Caste and Revolution

N.Ravi

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Author: N. Ravi

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Cover design: Seshu

Published by: ***Change Publications****, A-1,Swecha Apartments, Near Red Building, Bag Amberpet, Hyderabad - 500013*

Mail ID: *changepublications2017@gmail.com*

Published: December, 2024

Publication No. 6

First edition: December, 2024

₹150/-

For Copies:

N. Ravi: **nravi4416@gmail.com. Ph. 7032668635**

Navodaya Book House, Kachiguda, Hyderabad. Ph: 040-24652387

Nava Telangana, Chikkadpally, Hyderabad. Ph. 040-27608107

Printing: Karshak Art Printers, Vidya Nagar, Hyderabad.

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Author's Note

We belong to the generation who have entered the revolutionary movement after the Karamchedu massacre in Andhra Pradesh. Even before the implementation of the Mandal Commission recommended reservations, N.T. Rama Rao government had increased OBC reservations based on the Murali Dhar Rao Commission report. Students from upper castes, except those affiliated with revolutionary student unions, began protesting against the reservations. Opposing them, we took our first steps in the radical student movement, firmly standing in favour of reservations. As a result, our revolutionary journey began with an attempt to understand the questions raised by the Dalit movement and those tied to caste.

Against this backdrop, for the first time in life, we learned about Jyotirao Phule and many other social revolutionaries who fought against Brahminical dominance. Beyond just academically studying Ambedkar, we began understanding his struggle, efforts, and his philosophy regarding caste annihilation. The revolutionary movement clarified its stance on the caste question through its perspective paper, fostering a relatively comprehensive understanding of these issues.

When I started working in the rural and forest regions of Bihar and Jharkhand within the revolutionary movement, it provided a broader perspective on the caste dynamics in our country. The movement, as part of the mass line adopted by it, emphasizes learning from the people in practice as well as striving to understand theoretical and practical issues raised by various movements and groups. It has worked to improve awareness of problems like patriarchy, caste, race, religious minorities, Adivasis, and environmental concerns—issues not always seen as direct class problems and released perspective papers on them.

While we (My wife Anuradha and I) were arrested in 2009 and held in Hazaribagh Jail, Sridhar Srinivasan and Vernon Gonsalves, who had been arrested earlier, were in Nagpur Jail. We corresponded regularly, often discussing caste issues at length. Notably, Sridhar wrote extensively on "Towards a Marxist Understanding of Caste," which included unprecedentedly positive reflections on Ambedkar from a revolutionary perspective. I proposed that I will make some corrections, translate and send it to *Veekshanam* (a Telugu Magazine) for publication Sridhar declined to publish under his name as his release was nearing and due to some other reasons. Therefore, I submitted that article under my name to *Vikshanam*. This article is based primarily on Sridhar's note and discussions held on this topic with other political prisoners. Consequently, when compiling this collection, I credited Sridhar as the primary author. Tragically, not long after being released and rejoining the movement, that comrade was martyred, leaving the revolutionary movement bereft of a great intellectual and leader.

Except for the essay "Caste - Revolutionary Movement's Understanding and Practice," the other pieces in this collection are speeches delivered on various occasions. If these writings can address the criticism that the revolutionary movement has ignored caste, and contribute even slightly to fostering a proper understanding of caste annihilation, then the purpose of this collection will be fulfilled

Narla Ravi.

A Note towards a Marxist understanding On the Caste Question

- Sridhar Srinivasan, Narla Ravi

Marxists frequently encounter the question of the relation between caste and class in any discourse on the caste question and caste annihilation. Which is primary – caste or class? Is it Caste or Class that should form the basis for bringing about a qualitative change in the Indian Society? Or is the caste itself class in the specific Indian context? - These are the questions one encounters first. Another question that has most frequently cropped up in this discourse between the Marxists and Ambedkarites/ 'Dalitists' in the past seven to eight decades is the question of whether caste forms a part of the base or the superstructure. Therefore, it would be appropriate to address these questions first, while discussing the Marxist understanding of the caste question.

Relation between Caste and Class

What are classes?

"Classes are large groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated by law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organization of labour, and, consequently, by the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and the mode of acquiring it. Classes are groups of people one of which can appropriate the labour of another owing to the different places that they occupy in a definite system of social economy" - Lenin

If the relations between castes in the caste system are analysed in the light of the above formulations, caste as it existed historically was just a

form of class. Caste was just a particular form of class relations that arose in the specific context of India. When Ambedkar described caste as "closed class", this understanding is reflected to some extent, but neither Ambedkar nor others developed or elaborated on this theme of analysing the particularities of the caste system as "closed class".

Like any other phenomenon, caste has also been undergoing changes since its origin. Likewise, the relation between class and caste is also changing. We can observe that caste and class had close correspondence, congruence and overlap in the Indian feudal system, ever since caste originated and established itself firmly. But after the British entered the political, economic and social arena of India, they caused many changes in the caste - class relations. They disrupted the close correspondence of caste and class. Those changes gained a lot of momentum in the past six to seven decades and have led to a state where one can no longer claim that caste and class are one and the same.

Let's look at the above things in some detail.

Historically, caste had generally been the form and manifestation of class in feudal India. Speaking generally, being a member of a lower caste (i.e. *shudra* & *atishudra*) implied that one was a member of the exploited, ruled and oppressed classes of feudal India. And being an upper caste (i.e. *dwija* or *savarna* caste) implied that one had the opportunity to, and in most cases did become, a member of the ruling elite, exploiter and oppressor classes. There was a very close correspondence and even congruence between the caste hierarchy and the class system. Membership in a caste (which was by birth) settled the question of one's position in the social relations of production i.e. class structure. When seen in the light of these qualities, it is more realistic to view caste (in feudal India) as a part of Society's Base. Considering the critical significance of caste in feudal India, it is appropriate to term Indian feudalism as 'Caste feudalism'/ Caste based feudalism. (Com. Saketh Rajan, who was martyred in Karnataka, proposed in his book 'Making History' – the history of Karnataka - that it is appropriate to call the system that existed in India as the Shudra Holding System, in place of the Slave Holding system. Following him, Com Azad also described the system as shudra holding system in the notes on 'Indian

Economy' that he had prepared for study in the party). Any analysis of the feudal mode of production in India has to give sufficient centrality to the caste system.

The 'Caste feudalism' has undergone drastic transformation during the last 150 years or so (approximately). Broadly speaking, after the consolidation of British colonial rule following 1857 first war of independence, two driving forces caused this transformation. They are - the peoples struggles i.e. anti-caste and anti-landlord / anti-Zamindar struggles; and secondly the capitalist relations of production introduced in the interests of colonial exploitation. These relations of production have expanded and grown since then. Both these forces - peoples struggles and capitalist mode of production - influenced and reinforced each other in bringing about changes in the caste and feudal systems.

Impact of People's struggles on the Caste-Class correspondence and Congruence

The anti-Brahmin and anti-landlord /anti-Zamindar struggle which covered large parts of the country in the last part of the 19th century and first half of the 20th century resulted in the upper castes losing their monopoly over land. Sections of the upper echelons of the shudra castes i.e. peasant cultivator castes managed to either completely displace the savarna castes or forced them to accommodate them (the shudra peasant cultivator castes) at the apex of the now weakening caste feudal system. So here, we see a breakdown of the class-caste correspondence. A section of the oppressed exploited castes has migrated virtually into the ranks of the oppressor exploiting classes. And in this process these farming shudra castes broke out of the caste oppression by the upper castes. By 1947, almost everywhere in the country, sections of these shudra castes have emerged as rural elites and donned the mantle of the caste oppressors bequeathed to them by the upper castes.

Impact of Capitalist Relations of Production

The compulsions of colonial rule and capitalist production vastly expanded two major new classes- the proletariat and the urban middle class. The proletariat was drawn primarily from the atishudra (Dalit), lower shudra (artisanal and other lower castes) and to a lesser extent from the

peasant cultivating shudra castes. There were various push & pull factors that brought sections of these oppressed castes to join the ranks of the modern proletariat. This proletarian class was (is) a truly multi caste class. In due course of time, elements of the dispossessed and impoverished upper castes too have joined this class. The urban middle class which staffed the huge colonial administration – civil administration, police, military etc - was drawn from various castes, right from Dalits up to the upper castes. This middle class too was (is) a multi caste class.

Looking at these phenomena from the perspective of class, it is clear that class divisions emerged among the various castes. For instance, the shudra cultivating castes had been differentiated into exploiting and exploited classes. Similarly, one can see the formation of proletarian and middle classes amongst the other shudra castes. As far as Dalits are concerned, a small section managed to enter the middle class, but the vast majority either remained as poor or landless peasants or joined the ranks of the proletariat.

This process of class division among castes has continued relentlessly even after 1947.

Before examining the state of caste oppression in the present time, some important developments that took place after 1947 need to be taken into consideration.

The Telangana armed uprising and the New Democratic revolution that has been going on since 1967 have not only given a big jolt to the class relations in rural India but are instrumental in causing huge changes in caste relations. Ruling classes enacted land ceiling acts, even if reluctantly, to prevent the spread of the revolutionary movement. Though no land reforms as such were carried out by actually implementing these Acts, they had an indirect effect along with the direct role of the people's revolutionary struggle, in bringing about certain changes in land ownership patterns of various castes. The ruling classes also tried to implement "Green Revolution" to stop the "Red Revolution". The needs of capitalist production also warranted Green Revolution and therefore, it was implemented for fulfilling both purposes. (it is akin to the implementation of present-day Integrated Action Programme (IAD) in movement areas by pumping thousands of crores into it).

The sections of the shudra peasantry who had climbed into the ranks of the rural exploiting elite had taken further advantage of the land reform and the 'green revolution' and become immensely powerful economically, socially and politically. Today this section has joined the ruling classes and controls State power from the regional level up to the central government. Sections of these shudra castes have also broken into the ranks of the big capitalist class in India in a significant way. Earlier this class – the big capitalists- was completely monopolized by the upper castes, Marwari / Bania / Parsi sections. Today we find that several of the very big capitalists in this country have emerged from the ranks of the elite *Shudras* thereby further consolidating their position within the ruling classes.

As far as the Dalits are concerned, the agrarian revolutionary movement, the developing capitalist relations of production, and reservations have been playing an important role in their caste-class relations.

Landless agricultural workers and the poor peasants are the two most basic motive forces for the agrarian revolution. Most of the Dalits in the rural areas belong to these basic classes. Therefore, when revolutionary movement mobilises them on the slogan of land to the tiller, the movement was not limited to land struggles and struggle for wages, but almost everywhere it was also a struggle for self-respect. The movement questioned and fought against economic exploitation, and it also challenged all forms of extra economic coercions and exploitations. Therefore, the upper caste land lords and others as well had to put a stop to their upper caste arrogance and hegemony. At many places, Dalits led the village level mass organisations (youth leagues and agricultural workers and peasants associations) and brought the upper caste arrogance to its knees. They achieved this along with their class brethren without regard to their caste and religion. Caste relations undoubtedly underwent significant changes as tens of thousands of acres of land was liberated from the control/ occupation of the landlords in Telangana, Bihar and other places in the country where the revolutionary movement was strong. Landlords could never dream of caste attacks like Karamchedu and Chundur in the movement areas of Telangana.

Apart from the betterment of the living conditions of Dalits due to the agrarian revolutionary movement, more importantly they could come

out of the caste clutches of the landlords to a certain extent. This led to an overall enhancement of consciousness which enhanced the possibilities of utilising other opportunities.

As the possibilities and the consciousness to utilise reservations improved among the Dalits after 1947, a section among them grew into middle class. Some of them also utilised electoral politics and some rose to the higher echelons of bureaucracy there by gradually turning into comprador bourgeoisie politically. It may only be a miniscule section, but slowly and surely a section is emerging among them to become capitalists and comprador capitalists.

However, as far as Dalits are concerned, all these changes pertain only to relatively tiny section. Dalits not only continue to be the most oppressed caste, the overwhelming majority continue to belong to the most exploited classes of Indian society i.e. poor peasant, landless agricultural labour or proletariat.

The dynamics of agrarian class struggle and the expansion of capitalist mode of production continue till this day and the process of class differentiation of castes continues. Today, caste membership is losing more and more of its earlier significance in determining the position of a person in the social relations of production, i.e. class position except in the case of Dalits.

In the context of above changes, let's see what forms the present-day caste oppression has taken.

(a) Those sections of the shudra castes who emerged as part of the exploiting elite and even joined the ruling classes have become the main vehicles of caste oppression which is today almost entirely concentrated on the Dalits. A majority of the caste brethren of these elite shudra sections still remain in the ranks of the exploited classes i.e. middle, poor peasantry, agricultural labourers and proletariat. Though they are economically exploited, caste oppression and discrimination are a thing of the past and is currently negligible. However, the exploited sections of these castes still carry the burden / legacy of past caste oppression in terms of educational and cultural backwardness, though this too is diminishing. The elite of these castes have continued to foster and preserve caste identities because

it is useful for mobilisation of the entire caste for political advantage and also to mobilise foot soldiers to carry on oppression of the Dalits.

(b) For the lower rungs of the shudra castes (artisans, service castes etc) caste oppression is largely a thing of the past. Caste oppression in terms of compulsion to stick to caste determined occupations, or performing free labour service for the upper castes and other extra economic form of coercion has become negligible and lingers on only in pockets where feudal and caste oppression retain some strength. These castes generally belong to the exploited middle and poor peasantry, proletariat and urban middle classes. Educational and cultural backwardness continues to be quite severe. Electoral politics and access to crumbs have helped preserve caste consciousness and identity amongst these shudra castes. And these sections have been amenable for anti-Dalit mobilization.

(c) The picture is radically different for Dalits. For a majority of Dalits (especially in rural areas) caste continues as the factor determining their class position i.e. their position as the most exploited & oppressed in the relations of production. Dalits continue to face severe higher caste violence, extra economic forms of coercion, compulsion to perform caste determined menial & degrading services to the upper castes and severe forms of segregation and discrimination. Dalits brought about reduction in the intensity of caste oppression only when they managed to organize militant resistance and sustain it. In the last 50 years or so, the elite shudra castes have forged and developed a weapon of caste oppression - the anti-Dalit riot and 'atrocity'. These are periodically unleashed in order to intimidate, subdue and break Dalit assertion. And this form of oppression has found ready support from the various arms of the Indian state and political establishment, which either standby in tacit complicity or help to cover up and protect the perpetuators of these atrocities. Reservations in jobs have primarily been effective in reserving the most menial and lowest grade jobs for Dalits.

So, the picture that emerges today is somewhat like this. Caste oppression has largely ceased as far as shudra castes are concerned and where it has not, the trend is towards its elimination. Caste oppression has narrowed its sweep and become concentrated almost entirely on the Dalits.

As far as Dalits are concerned the correspondence of class and caste largely continues and caste oppression continues. Caste oppression is thus primarily a 'Dalit question' seen in the form of discrimination, oppression, physical attacks etc. The principal perpetuators of caste oppression on Dalits are the elite shudra castes who have ascended into economic and political power. These elite shudra castes have been successful in mobilizing their impoverished caste brothers as foot soldiers in their attacks on Dalits.

All in all, caste as a system of exploitation and oppression, as a system of determining the class position of an individual has ceased or is clearly on the way to extinction as far as the Shudras are concerned – Shudras who constitute a majority of the population. However, it continues (in the sense underlined above) largely intact as far as the majority of the 165 million Dalits are concerned.

However, two millennia of caste oppression leaves a huge legacy of cultural & educational backwardness which still acts as a hurdle and a grave disadvantage when compared with the position of the upper castes.

Though many changes have taken place in the base as we have discussed above, caste as a system of identity, consciousness, culture, notions of superiority, hierarchy, prejudice, custom etc continues in a very powerful way in the life of Indian society as a whole. Though there have been changes in these 'super structural' aspects of caste, they have not been anywhere as significant as the changes that have occurred in the base. And modern Indian society, especially its political system has generated powerful forces that reinforce and strengthen these super structural manifestations of caste. These super structural aspects have their due influence on the base – preventing and creating hurdles for its eradication.

Which is primary? Caste or Class?

On the question of deciding the primacy of class or caste, Marxists have tended to approach the question in a faulty manner which in no small measure contributed to the confusion and distrust in Dalits.

In the past there wouldn't have been a controversy on the issue if it had been accepted that caste was the form in which class existed. But today with the developments talked of above – there can be no doubt that class is the primary, that class has become distinct from caste and is the decisive category. (For majority of Dalits caste and class still overlap to

large extent). Class is the category that is decisive and influences all things. So, one has to defend the class approach / analysis for all social phenomena. Any view / ideology that considers caste as the primary category needs to be opposed.

Class is primary over caste because there is class division in all the castes; there are now exploited/oppressed and exploiters/oppressors in all the castes; ruling classes now comprise sections of the erstwhile oppressed castes etc. Considering caste identity and unity as being above class identity and solidarity is actually nothing but collaboration with enemy classes. Only the unity of the oppressed and exploited classes can lead to eradication of the caste system.

Caste – Base and Superstructure

"In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness". **(Karl Marx)**

Communists, for long, suffered from a mechanical understanding about base and superstructure as far as caste is concerned. Having separated class from caste, placing caste in the category of superstructure and class in the base, this mistake was further compounded by a wrong (mechanical) understanding of the relation between base and superstructure. The relation between base and superstructure was understood merely as a mechanical relationship between cause and effect. No doubt the relation between base and superstructure is one of cause and effect. But it is more than that too. It is not a simple linear system of interaction. There is also the important aspect of effect having feedback and influencing the cause. That an effect once having come into being not only influences the base but also grows and develops in ways that are not completely determined by the cause. Engels cautioned about this mechanical understanding of the relation between base and superstructure:

"According to the materialist conception of history, the ultimately determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. More than this neither

*Marx nor I have ever asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the **only** determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure..... also exercise their influence on the course of the historical struggle and in many cases preponderate in determining their **form**"*

Engels – Letter to J. Bloch

Indian Marxists made two errors in analysing caste which led to mistakes in practice too. First, there was the error of not grasping that caste was a form of class peculiar to India and considering it as a superstructural manifestation. Second was a mechanical understanding that superstructural forms would automatically disappear if the base was transformed. This erroneous theoretical understanding led to very serious mistakes in tactics and practice. Fighting caste became a lower priority, something that would be sorted out in the course of social development. Often in practice confronting and struggling on caste issues was avoided/ neglected if it was perceived that doing so would adversely impact 'class' unity. For instance, the Kisan Sabhas lead by Marxists in the past, which fought the old Zamindar classes, would often avoid raising issues of caste oppression and discrimination on the understanding that doing so would adversely affect the class unity of the peasantry. The same happened in the sphere of working class / trade union movements led by the earlier Marxists. The mistrust and alienation that all this fostered persists till this day. The Dalit movement which should objectively have been a natural ally of the communist movement continues to maintain its distance which is to a large measure (but not wholly) due to this error of understanding and practice by the communists in the past.

The debate on base & superstructure concerning caste has today become quite surreal and infructuous. The objective reality has dramatically changed in the last 100 years. For most sections of the population (i.e. Shudras) caste largely exists as a superstructural entity. It no longer determines their class position in society. Only as far as Dalits are concerned can it be argued that caste continues to exist as part of the base. Here too class categories have separated out and are becoming slowly distinct from caste. Therefore, debating on this issue in the 21st century has become

sterile and futile. If one were a historian, it would have some significance but for a movement engaged in creating social change it has little value.

Also, there is one more thing about base & superstructure – a general comment. Transformations in base do result in the creation of new superstructures (ideology, politics, culture, customs, form of rule, etc.). But this does not necessarily mean that old super structural forms will disappear or be destroyed. Quite often old superstructural forms get renewed lease of life (adapting and mutating to the needs of the new base or inversely the new base modifying and adapting old superstructural forms to meet its needs) and continue to survive & thrive in new forms. For instance, patriarchy has survived through various qualitative transformations in the base, over several societies, and continues to exist in capitalism. The reason is that every new mode of production that came into existence found patriarchy useful for the perpetuation of the form of exploitation associated with that mode of production. Or for instance discrimination against coloured people continues in US though the slave system based on race has long since been eradicated. The reason is that US capitalism and society sees material benefit in it. Similarly, despite the development and growth of capitalism in India, caste in the form of discrimination & prejudice or in its extreme forms of violence on Dalits, or in the almost universal continuation of caste identity etc. – continues to survive and exist in new forms because it serves the interests of the capitalist class as well and not just because it serves the interests of the feudal classes. It is fairly well established that old forms of exploitation and oppression, are usurped, modified and utilized by new exploiting classes to the extent that it serves their interest.

This discussion would be incomplete if we do not discuss another contradictory aspect of this base – superstructure conundrum. Both the communists, who considered the caste question as a superstructural aspect and the Naxalites/Maoists, who consider the caste issue/Dalit issue as an integral part of the class question and/or an issue pertaining to both base and superstructure, worked towards the resolution of the issue by mainly working to change the base i.e. to change the production relations, which is ultimately the decisive factor. For e.g. when they raised the slogan "land

to the tiller" – the principal beneficiaries are the landless and poor peasants, 80% to 90% of whom belong to the Dalit castes and backward castes. Even with regard to the origin of caste, the Marxist analysis has accorded primacy to the aspects related above. The exploitation of the labour of Dalits and shudra castes that is behind the origin of the caste system, the usefulness of varna/caste divisions for the expropriation of Dalits and Shudras from the ownership of the instruments of production etc. occupied a prime place in Marxist analysis. Ironically those who criticise the communists that they have analysed the issue as a superstructural aspect (we have already seen in detail that this is a valid criticism), themselves identify Brahminical ideology as the principal reason behind the origin of the caste system. It is true that there is no caste system at all without Brahminical ideology. But the main drawback of this analysis is it sees only the ideology but not the economics behind it. Neither Ambedkar nor the Dalit ideologues consider changing the base at all in resolving the caste issue. Thus, they neither talk about the importance of economic base in the origin of caste nor in its annihilation. Their whole emphasis is on the fight in the superstructure. Though the revolutionary parties previously had shortcomings both theoretically as well as in practice in specifically concentrating on anti-caste struggles in order to annihilate caste, they have always tried to rectify them. But it is ironical and contradictory that the same Ambedkarites/Dalit ideologues, who criticise the Marxists that they do not view the caste question as the question of base, do not realise that they themselves are fighting caste (both in the theoretical arena and practice) in the superstructural aspects only.

We frequently get to see that those who criticise the shortcomings of the communists in theory and practice with regard to caste fail to see any difference between CPI, CPM and the Maoists. Some do so intentionally and some due to lack of information. There has been a sea change in the theory and practice of Maoists as far as the caste question is concerned after they separated from the revisionists. This theoretical change can be seen way back in 1974 itself in their documents "Road to Revolution" and "Our Tactical Line".

"It is not correct to think that only the struggles on economic issues are class struggles or to view the social issues separately. If we look at the nature of the caste system in our country, caste question is ultimately a class question... If we see it on caste basis, we can see that the agrarian revolution, that is the axis of the New democratic revolution takes place between the so-called upper castes and lower castes. Therefore, similar to the nationality question, which is ultimately a class question throughout the world, in India caste question is in the ultimate analysis a class question"

"But why is it not correct to theorise directly that the democratic revolution or agrarian revolution is a revolution to be carried out by the backward castes against the forward castes? We should not give such a call. Because, though 90% of the landlords belong to the upper castes, majority of those belonging to the upper castes also face the oppression or exploitation of the landlords. Likewise, though 90% of those belonging to the backward castes are landless workers or poor peasants, there are a few landlords or even comprador bourgeois belonging to those castes. Therefore, agrarian revolution is not one that is going on between the so-called upper castes and the lower castes."

This theoretical understanding was different from that of the revisionists existing till that time. In the context of the questions raised by the Dalit movement in AP, the Maoist party reviewed its efforts on this issue and formulated the policy paper "Caste Question in India – Our Perspective". The theoretical position as well as the practical way ahead, have been clearly spelt out in this document.

"While caste has its superstructural aspects like Brahminical ideology we must recognise that caste is also an integral part of the production relations, i.e., the base of society. We have shown ..... The role of caste in the base which was the strongest under caste-based feudalism, has now decreased with the development of semi-feudalism and the growth of capitalist relations. However, caste will continue to play a role in the base as long as semi-feudalism exists and as long as the caste system is used by the bourgeois to facilitate its exploitation and rule.....The eradication of caste is only possible through an all-round attack on caste at both base and superstructural levels, from the very beginning till its final elimination."

The above formulation is definitely a significant theoretical step forward on caste. The process of review and refinement has been going on. In the Unity congress of the Maoist party (2007) also the feudalism in India is described as 'Brahminical feudalism', and the caste issue is given

due importance in its basic documents of 'Programme' and 'Strategy and Tactics'.

Any discussion on caste issue that refuses to see these developments is a dishonest discussion.

Why caste continues to be pervasive and resilient despite the considerable changes that have taken place:

The continuation of caste despite considerable changes having taken place is a perplexing issue.

It has been common among Marxists to explain the strong persistence of caste consciousness, caste identities, caste discrimination and their pervasiveness by pointing out that India has not yet undergone a democratic revolution; that capitalist relations have grown not by destroying feudal relations in a revolutionary struggle but by a process of reform and accommodation etc. etc; that because of this, feudal / caste culture etc have not been challenged and vanquished in revolutionary battle and therefore they continue to survive and exist. This is true in a general way. It is akin to saying that had capitalism established itself in a revolutionary way, say like in France, then the excrescences like caste would have been swept away. But the fact is that capitalism has not grown in India in that manner. Indian capitalism has grown in the context of colonialism and through adjustment and accommodation with feudalism. As mentioned earlier, capitalism has also been known to preserve and foster old forms of oppression & exploitation if it suited its purposes. It is my opinion that Indian capitalism has found it advantageous to preserve the caste system in the form of caste consciousness, caste identities, caste prejudices, the attendant caste discrimination etc. Therefore, one must see the Indian capitalist class (and therefore imperialism as it operates in India) as one of the class-based factors for continuation of caste in whatever form it exists. The class basis for caste is not just the remaining feudal classes. The persistence of caste is beneficial to the capitalist class not just in direct economic terms (though that is also there to some degree), the benefit is mainly political i.e. in terms of social containment and stability in forms of rule. As far as the direct economic benefits are concerned, they are obvious – feudal and capitalist landlords (also bourgeoisie) equally benefit

in terms of cheap labour, free labour services etc. etc. by continuing caste oppression especially against the Dalits. And in the capitalist industrial sector one can get away with paying lower wages if Dalits are incorporated in the lowest / most menial jobs. But these are not the primary benefits accruing to the capitalist class (Comprador Bureaucratic Bourgeoisie and imperialism also) by the continued prevalence of caste.

It is the absolute divisiveness and social fragmentation that caste generates that benefits the capitalist class most. It is one of the most powerful instruments to disrupt class unity, it provides for control and containment, and diversion of social unrest, it helps immensely for reactionary social / political mobilization – all of these go to strengthening stability of class rule. And ultimately this stability contributes economically to class exploitation. The primary reason why Dalits still face the brunt of caste system and oppression is primarily because the most effective manner to foster and preserve caste consciousness in other sections of the populations is by having a Dalit caste. Notions of superiority and inferiority, upper and lower, us & them, of prejudice etc. etc. cannot be easily sustained if there did not exist a Dalit caste. The above mentioned political / social needs of the bourgeoisie are primary / central to not only the continuation and pervasiveness of caste consciousness but also for the fact that caste oppression has concentrated almost entirely on Dalits. That all organs of the state apparatus – repressive machinery, judiciary, administration, electoral system & parliamentary bodies all assist and work to preserve caste in the interests of the bourgeoisie and other ruling classes. Through various ways they foster, reinforce and recreate conditions for survival of caste consciousness and its consequent effects. Not only must Marxists understand this deeply and in all its ramifications, they also need to convince the Dalit / anti caste movements of this fact. For without this understanding, movements for annihilation of caste will never be able to identify the real enemy today. Even at the cost of repetition it has to be reasserted that what exists of the caste system today is not just a requirement of feudal relations (to whatever extent one thinks they exist) but is an important tool of the bourgeoisie for maintaining the current class rule.

Apart from the above, there are two other things that have contributed to retention of caste consciousness and caste identities. They are the

bourgeois electoral system and reservations. These are not independent or unrelated to the primary reason but deserve mention on their own right.

The bourgeois electoral process and the centrality that caste mobilization plays in it consistently recreate and strengthen caste identities which are intrinsically reactionary. For the ruling classes, caste mobilization is a useful way of preserving the power structures in a cheap and effective manner. And for the exploited people, in the absence of a strong class consciousness, caste association gives them the illusory promise of material benefits if their caste brethren ascend into positions of power and privilege. The electoral process from the village level up to the state level always holds out the possibility of some benefits (mostly illusory) if there are more representatives of their caste in the power structure. The ruling classes have carefully nurtured and preserved this illusion with occasional crumbs. Caste factor has become so pervasive that it is impossible for anyone who participates in election (either as a contestant or a voter) to avoid it. This elaborate network of elections has become an important source for reasserting and reconsolidating caste identities and consciousness that would have otherwise receded under the pressures of daily class exploitation and existence.

While talking about the negative aspect of reservations, it has to be asserted at the very outset that reservations should be strongly supported not only for Dalits but also for the OBCs. But that should not blind us to the serious negative effects in terms of sustaining caste consciousness and identities. The fight to get some small portion of the crumbs (job reservations) has resulted in assertion of caste identities and consciousness. It has had a very divisive influence – Dalits are divided on demands of sub quotas within quotas. Same is the case for OBC castes fighting to get included in the reserved categories. The united fight against unemployment gets undermined by this scramble for caste reservations. Despite this negative aspect of reservations, they have to be supported for two reasons. Firstly, it is a reform, a partial demand which provides for some amelioration in a society based on caste discrimination and prejudice. If it were not for reservations, the upper castes who have all the advantages and privileges in their favour would be completely monopolising all resources and jobs.

Reservations give a chance to Dalits and OBCs to break this hegemony. Secondly, reservation is a strong demand of the people facing caste discrimination and oppression and since it gives them some benefit it must be supported. Reservations are somewhat like the partial demands of workers and just as one supports such demands the same logic applies for reservations. But the point is that this system of reservations does foster the divisive and fragmentary qualities of caste consciousness.

If one gets access to a scarce resource due to caste 'connections' then it acts as a powerful reinforcement for retaining caste affiliations and identity. In a society divided by caste, scarce resources or those resources whose supply falls very short of demand will be naturally distributed either to the persons who pay the most or to people belonging to the caste of the person holding the resource. More often it is a combination of both. The point is that even this thing goes towards reinforcing caste.

The above are just some factors that further contribute to the sustenance of caste. There are many more factors but these are often not given the importance that they deserve. In the past some Marxists cited the above-mentioned negative aspect of reservation to argue against the policy of reservation. But this was a wrong argument. It is always the case that reforms result in giving further lease of life to the system one wishes to abolish. Demanding and getting better terms of sale for labour power has the side effect of giving a further lease of life to the conditions for the sale of labour power. But to oppose wage demands on this ground would be foolish. So it is with reservations.

Historical reasons for the distance between the Communist Movement and Dalit Movement

In order to try and understand the present gap between the communist (revolutionary) movement and the Dalit movement, it is necessary to briefly touch upon the history of anti-caste struggles since the British period. There are two waves of this struggle.

First wave of the Anti-Caste Struggles

The anti-Brahminical struggles of the shudra cultivating castes/classes are the main struggles of this first wave. It was these cultivating castes which led this wave and mobilized all the other shudra castes and even

Dalits in its wake. In the first half of the 20th century, these anti Brahmin struggles were joined (in the sense that it also was carried on in the same period) by the anti- zamindari / anti-land lord struggles of the kisan sabhas. These struggles were immensely successful since they broke the monopoly of the upper castes (Brahmin & other savarna – dwija castes) over the principal means of production i.e. land. Not only broke their monopoly, but also began the process of their almost complete eviction from control over land. This process has already been mentioned earlier. Suffice it to restate that the shudra cultivating castes ascended into the ranks of the feudal elite and consequently emerged as the main class and caste oppressors in the countryside. The breakdown of class – caste correspondence etc are already mentioned earlier. The important point to note is that the Dalits were left high and dry with no relief accruing to them either from class exploitation or caste oppression. The struggle against caste system was dropped from the agenda by these newly emerged elites from among the shudra castes. Having achieved an elevation in their class status and getting rid of (upper) savarna caste oppression, the upper echelons of the shudra castes dropped the 'social' agenda and merged themselves politically with the congress led 'national' movement. This movement was already dominated by the Brahmins and upper castes. One can (must) imagine and understand the anguish of the Dalits who viewed this as a great betrayal. It is important also in order to understand why almost all Dalit movements that emerged after these anti-Brahmin / anti-zamindar struggles had ebbed generally kept aloof from the 'national' struggle. It is important also to understand why most Dalit movements (maybe all) which occurred in the British period (first half of 20th century) – i.e. Ambedkar led, *namoshudra, adidravid*, etc. etc. – all made political compromises and adjustments with the British. They saw that as the only avenue to gain some reliefs and concessions. And unfortunately, the communists of that time too did not conduct themselves in a manner to gain the confidence of the Dalits by taking forward the anti-caste struggle with a view to resolving the question of Dalit oppression.

Combined with the faulty theorisation of caste as superstructure and that caste oppression would be resolved in due course with the change in

base, was the one-sided assertion of the communists of the primacy of the 'anti-imperialist' / 'national struggle', and that all social ills would be resolved once this task was achieved. This led the Dalit movements to extend their suspicion to the communists. This sense of betrayal and suspicion has survived and lasted till this day. It is necessary to know this historical background to understand the suspicion of Dalit movements towards communist movements. Any suggestion that caste is secondary (or inversely that class is primary), or an assertion that fight against imperialism is primary makes Dalit movements feel immediately that anti caste struggle is given a short shrift or relegated to the background.

The first wave achieved a major victory in the fight against Brahmanism and upper caste oppression. The most important achievement was the eviction of the upper castes from their monopoly position over land. This paved the way for the most dramatic change in the system of caste oppression – caste oppression began to break down for the majority of the population who were mainly all the shudra castes. Also, this movement resulted in the breakdown of the correspondence of class & caste and the formation of multi caste classes.

The Second wave

The second wave is the emergence of the Dalit movements under their own independent banner of revolt. These Dalit movements against caste oppression emerged as the anti-Brahmin / anti-Zamindar struggles led by the shudra castes were winding down and they and their leadership were being co-opted by the 'national' movement.

Some objective circumstances need to be borne in mind while evaluating the Dalit movements that emerged at that time. The anti-Brahmin struggle led by the Shudras was a movement of the majority against a minority. It was a struggle of the 'Bahujan' – a unity among all oppressed castes. Now with the shudra leadership abandoning the anti-caste struggle (having climbed into the apex of the caste-feudal structure), the Dalits who were a small minority were left holding the banner of revolt against caste oppression. Confronted with a very difficult task of fighting caste oppression on their own, most of the Dalit movements took an approach of seeking solution or at least mitigation of oppression by escaping out of

the oppressive village level caste and– feudal relationships. The Dalit movements began to give importance to attaining education, moving into occupations outside of the village economy or to be a part of the colonial state apparatus. This meant negotiating for concessions and relief from the colonial state which resulted in these Dalit movements adopting ambivalent and compromising positions with the British. Another factor to be taken into account is the fact that the 'national' movement was led by the upper castes and the newly victorious shudra castes had merged into it. The fact that this section had no enthusiasm for anti-caste agenda (in fact quite the reverse) further drove the Dalit movements away from a position of confronting the British.

In areas where the communist led Kisan Sabhas were strong, the shudra castes who won concessions from the upper caste / feudal lords, went and joined the communist movement. This was one of the factors which contributed to the communist movement not vigorously pursuing caste abolition as its agenda. The faulty theorisation of the communists about caste further aided this.

We should not however forget that the communists and then more importantly, Naxalites at a later stage mobilised Dalits in a big way in class struggles against landlords.

Obviously, there are more factors at work for the growing distance between the communist movement and the Dalit anti caste movement i.e. sectarianism & narrowness of Dalit bourgeoisie leadership which wants to preserve their caste vote bank, the intrigues and machinations of the ruling classes and their state.

The above mentioned radically different conditions that the emerging Dalit movement (in the first half of the 20th century) faced called for a very different strategy and tactics for caste annihilation.

It called for a reassessment of its 'friends & enemies'. The only way the caste annihilation struggle of Dalits could be taken ahead successfully could be through forging unity of the Dalits with the oppressed & exploited classes from the shudra castes. And further by integrating this struggle as an integral part of the democratic & anti-imperialist movement. To be fair to the leaderships of the Dalit movements, at that time one could not have

expected them to make this analysis which could have been best done by the communists who had the scientific tools of Marxist social analysis. Unfortunately, the communists of that day failed to do so. The net result of this failure was that the task of caste annihilation remained incomplete as was the overall task of democratic revolution.

Nevertheless, the Dalit movements did achieve some significant advances in the cause of caste annihilation. Ambedkar and his theorizations were the most advanced of all that the various Dalit movements in the country brought to the fore. Ambedkar more than anyone else, should be credited for having forced the universal acceptance / recognition by society that caste oppression of Dalits was the central issue of caste oppression and that it was yet to be resolved. He brought pressure on the society to universally condemn Dalit oppression, and forced the post-colonial state to legally outlaw untouchability and provide for sanctions against caste oppression of Dalits. He also ensured that reform measures in the form of legal provisions were taken up to mitigate the effects of caste oppression of Dalits (i.e. reservations, making it illegal to exclude Dalits from public spaces etc.). The Dalit movements, and particularly Ambedkar's contribution have forced Brahmanism as an ideology and theoretical justification of caste system on to the defensive. Though Brahmanism (casteist ideology) continues to thrive it cannot do so in an unashamedly open way as in the past but through camouflage and concealment. (Of course, there exist hard-core revivalists who espouse it but general society has to condemn it or at least display pretence of condemnation). These are not small achievements when one considers the depth and expanse of caste oppression and casteist ideology entrenched in Indian society.

This second wave of anti-caste movements i.e. the Dalit movement, while it is still active and has not exhausted itself, it has sunk into the problem of running in concentric circles, or running to stay in the same place. Till this date the Dalit movement has not been able to develop the necessary analysis and the concomitant strategy and tactics which will help it to forge the necessary unity with the other oppressed & exploited classes which alone can generate the strength to annihilate caste altogether. The Dalit movement has also not been able to generate an understanding of

which social forces / classes are the enemies that form the targets of the anti-caste movement. In short it has not been able to overcome the old problem of correctly identifying the 'friends and enemies' of the anti-caste movement. And since 1947 the Dalit movement has been further encumbered with the baggage of constitutionalism, parliamentarism, co-optation into status quoist politics, becoming appendages to bourgeoisie politicking, sectarianism etc. From time to time a radical trend emerges from within the Dalit movement that seeks to shrug off all these encumbrances and seek solutions in broader unity with exploited classes and militant struggles. A prime example is the Dalit Panther movement which arose in Maharashtra in the early seventies. But here too the efforts have not been sustained or consolidated and have over the years sunk back into the old problems.

During the last twenty years (approximately) there has been an expansion and resurgence of Ambedkarism in Dalit movements all over the country (earlier Ambedkarism had its strongest influence in Maharashtra). The reason for this too is similar to the causes that threw up the Dalit Panther movement. On the one side, an immense frustration with the dead end that the leaderships of the movement had led them into and on the other side no noteworthy or convincing alternatives emerging from other quarters (for instance the communist movement). So this has resulted in the emerging petty bourgeoisies from among the Dalits in various parts of the country going back to Ambedkarism for solutions. And once the petty bourgeoisie sections have absorbed Ambedkarism, its influence has begun to grow among Dalit masses outside of Maharashtra. And since Ambedkarism (or Ambedkar thought as Anand Teltumbde suggests) stands head and shoulders above all other thought produced from within the Dalit movement, it has been possible to delink it from the ideology/politics of the earlier leaderships and see it as a salvation ideology / theory. It can be argued that this resurgence of Ambedkarism at a pan India level also has its source in the promotion that the ruling elite/state has given it in order to divert Dalit movements from seeking radical or revolutionary alternatives. Undoubtedly this factor will be there, but it is secondary or

only acts to strengthen the tendencies that have risen from within the Dalit movements in the country.

Any prospects of success in its fundamental aim of annihilating caste only lie in this movement correctly understanding its 'friends & enemies'. This means understanding that only the unity of the Dalit movement with the other oppressed and exploited classes (regardless of caste) can generate the strength to end caste. And the movement must understand that it is the Indian ruling classes i.e. comprador bourgeoisie, imperialism, feudalism and this state which are the perpetuators of the caste system and that these are the targets / enemies of the movement. Without this understanding the Dalit movement will survive and carry on, moving in circles achieving a crumb here and a reform there but never realizing the aim of caste annihilation.

Ambedkar and Ambedkarism

Ambedkar is without doubt one of the greatest bourgeois social reformers that India has thrown up. He towers over most others in his contribution to the task of annihilation of caste. In terms of ideology, he belongs to the tradition of progressive bourgeois liberalism. By his own admission his ideological inspiration came from the school of Fabian socialism. So like the 'Fabian Socialists' his denouncements and railing against capitalism must be seen as a desire to rid it of its most egregious aspects, bring some amelioration to the classes exploited by capitalism and to 'humanise' it so to speak. It was inevitable that such views also adopted some of the slogans and rhetoric of the socialist movement. Ambedkar's attempts to build workers unions and organization must be seen in this context and in essence similar to attempts of Fabian Socialists elsewhere to build workers unions.

Ambedkar's principal positive contributions are pointed out earlier in this note and communists and democrats have to admit them without hesitation. Let's now discuss some errors and problems of Ambedkar and Ambedkarism.

Ambedkar located the source / origins of caste system in religion – Hinduism. This is akin to locating the source or origins of relations of production in the ideological justifications for it. It is similar to saying that

superstructural manifestations are the cause of the base. Consequently, eradication of the caste system was sought to be achieved by almost exclusively fighting its ideological and cultural manifestation while neglecting the more important task of fighting it by transforming the relations of production which gave rise to it.

This erroneous thinking prevented him from grasping that British imperialism had entered into an alliance with the feudal classes (and therefore also helped preserve the caste system). For him since the ideology and culture of casteism was principal, he assumed that the British were free of casteism or neutral to it. Similarly, he was unable to grasp that the Indian ruling classes (the big bourgeoisie, feudal classes) and their reactionary state was the principal force that preserved & protected caste oppression & exploitation. Though Ambedkar had his contradictions and quarrels with the Indian ruling classes, their state and their principal political representatives from time to time, he was unable to see that they were in fact the principal enemy and needed to be the target of the caste annihilation movement. This approach of locating the source of caste system in the superstructural ideological / cultural manifestations continues till this day in the Ambedkarite movement. It is ironic that those who shout loudest that caste is base end up pointing out to superstructural (ideological – cultural) aspects of Brahminism – Manu Smruti – Hinduism as the source of caste system. And it is these very same people who always avoid or neglect targeting the Indian ruling classes and their state as the principal enemies of the Dalits& oppressed castes. This is one of the important errors of the Ambedkar and Ambedkarites since then, and one has to confront it in trying to build up a caste annihilation movement.

The struggle against superstructural – ideological – cultural manifestations is very important and cannot be neglected in the slightest way, but it can't be at the cost of neglecting, ignoring the basic and most important task of transforming the actual relations of production, of fighting the ruling classes and their state which is the main bulwark of class & caste oppression & exploitation. One needs to point this out to the Ambedkarites without diluting or making light of the struggle in the ideological plane.

The Ambedkarites-led anti-caste movement does confront the ruling classes and the State from time to time, but this is on an issue to issue, case to case basis, within the framework of extracting concessions & reforms, but never at a programmatic or strategic level i.e. with the view to eliminating the ruling classes and their State.

Another problematic area is in regard to how imperialism is viewed. As pointed out earlier Ambedkar had a non-confrontational approach with imperialism. He has made some criticism of colonialism in his writings but in the realm of politics he did not have any qualms in making compromises with colonialists and even being on the same side of the line at various times. This was rooted in the failure to see the alliance and collaboration that the Indian capitalist class & feudalism had with imperialism. This approach has continued to dominate till this day. Very few from the Ambedkarite movement today comprehend the importance of fighting imperialist domination in India or even grasp that the domestic ruling classes are in close collaboration with imperialism.

Another major problematic issue is the one concerning the approach towards power. Neither in Ambedkar nor in most of his followers till this day, is there an understanding that political power is ultimately a reflection of the relations of production. That ownership and control of the means of production is translated into political power and that without such ownership or control political power cannot be really had. Not able to develop a political perspective & strategy to unite all the exploited & oppressed classes to overturn the existing relations of production and through this process seize political power, Ambedkar and his followers have sought the illusion of power in parliamentary seats and ministerial posts. And this illusory power was only obtainable by making adjustments and compromises and alliances on such basis with ruling class sections and their political representatives. And in a way what began as a tragedy with Ambedkar has become a most obnoxious farce with the current Dalit petty bourgeois leadership. With the BSP, this logic has reached its highest development. They have even theorized it with the concept of 'social engineering'.

So, in two most important areas there are major problems – identification of friends and enemies and on the question of political power.

Most of the other areas of differences, controversies etc. evolve from the faulty understanding on these questions.

We would like to end this note with just a comment on the difference that Ambedkar and current day Ambedkarites have with the communist movement. It is now quite widely held both in Ambedkarite circles and also among the revolutionary communist movement that the cause of the alienation of the Dalit movement with the communists is largely owing to the errors of the communists in – not giving sufficient importance to caste annihilation, theoretically relegating caste to superstructure and assuming that as a superstructural residue it will automatically disappear with the development of forces of production and emergence of new relations of production etc. Also, that the communists neglected and sacrificed anti-caste struggle at the altar of a mechanical understanding of class struggle. But this does not sufficiently explain away the problem of alienation. Actually, the ideological – political differences that the Dalit movement (and Ambedkar especially) had with the congress (and Gandhi) was qualitatively much greater. However, both Ambedkar and current day Ambedkarites find it easier to make political alliances with the congress and now even with the most right-wing ruling class parties. This is because of the way they conceived of political power. In their fatally flawed conception of political power, it is permissible to make such alliances which are in essence opportunistic. This is one of the reasons why the differences with the communists are over-exaggerated and over-emphasized. Therefore, if the alienation has to be bridged it is not sufficient for communists to acknowledge their historical errors of understanding and practice, but it must also be accompanied by bringing about a realization in the Dalit movement's leadership that their conception of achieving political power is profoundly flawed. It is also equally important for the Dalit Movement to critically evaluate itself, to achieve unity with the communist revolutionaries who are engaged in class struggle including anti caste struggle, and to stop going after one or the other ruling section or party for some concessions and favours. Only then will it pave the way for caste annihilation.

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Annihilation of Caste – New Democratic Revolution

With the Naxalbari rebellion in 1967, the new democratic revolutionary path took firm root in our country. It forcefully introduced the notion of 'new human beings' in the country. Naxalbari did not confine itself to political arena. Alongside blazing the path of revolution in India, it taught us to think with an innovative perspective in all fields such as literature, arts and cinema. It taught us to look at history from the perspective of the oppressed. That new perspective left no field untouched.

Until then, the Communist Party had organized the peasants and agricultural workers only in a few struggles like the Tebhaga struggle, the Telangana armed peasant movement and a few others. The Naxalbari struggle, and then the CPI (ML) born out of that struggle, however, unequivocally stated that the agrarian revolution is the axis of the new democratic revolution. In other words, it formulated that the key motive forces in this revolution are the agricultural workers (landless farmers) and the poor peasants led by the working class. It led the revolutionaries of the country to destroy the semi-colonial and semi-feudal relations of the country. Rural areas turned into the main centers of struggle.

The destruction of semi-feudal relations in the countryside meant the overthrow of the economic, political and social hegemony of the landlords. In its place, under the leadership of the landless and poor peasants, the political and social hegemony of the downtrodden was to be established by including other allied classes and groups such as the middle class peasantry, artisans and a section of the rich peasants and other similar forces who were suffocating under the yoke of semi-feudalism and semi-

colonialism. In order to radically change the relations of production and place the economic power in the hands of these classes, which is possible only if they capture power throughout the country, it has taken the path of advancing the armed revolutionary struggle in that direction.

In the 1970s, the landlords in rural areas mainly comprised of upper castes. There were only a few exceptions. Similarly, landless and poor peasants comprised mainly of Dalits and other lower castes. Therefore, the overthrow of semi-feudal relations essentially meant the overthrow of the dominance of the upper caste landlords.

It is because of this social reality that when the CPI (ML) party called upon the revolutionaries, especially the student and youth, to 'Go to the Villages', they were especially given a direction to take shelter first among the 'Dalits' in the villages. The amount of time they spent with the 'landless' and socially marginalized 'Dalits' and how well they mobilized these sections into the revolution was the yardstick used to measure how much the revolutionaries intermingled with the people. The then CPI (ML) resolved that Dalits, who are mainly landless peasants, should be brought into the leadership positions of revolutionary peasant councils, the organs of state power established in the rural areas where the revolutionary movement had intensified and was in a position to exercise such power. With this, for the first time in history, Dalits got an opportunity to wield real power at the rural level.

It is because of this kind of firm determination that the Dalit households became the first places of refuge and footholds for the revolutionary movement in the rural areas of the plains. That was the case throughout the rural areas of India, whether it is in Debra-Gopi Vallabhpur; Lakhimpur-kheri; innumerable villages in Bhojpur region and Jehanabad, Gaya, Aurangabad and Patna districts of Bihar; or hundreds of villages in Karimnagar, Adilabad, Nizamabad and Warangal districts including Jagityala and Sirisilla in Telangana, villages in Palnadu area of AP, or the villages of Dharmapuri district in Tamil Nadu etc. 'Naxalite party' got the reputation throughout the country that it is a party especially of the Dalits or the lower castes. It created a confidence among the people of those castes that it is 'their party'. Dominant caste exploiters also looked at it as the party of especially SCs and STs.

One cannot say that all this was done by taking up a special program on caste, but it was done bearing in mind the fact that ninety percent of the people belonging to the lower working classes are mainly from the lower castes. Not only that, communist revolutionaries had naturally considered that untouchability is the worst and most inhuman practice of the caste system in our country and that it had to be eradicated. The experience of the Chinese Cultural Revolution taught that only if the state power is in the hands of the lowest toiling classes, will there be guarantee for the success of the revolution and for its continuation post revolution. It is because of this outlook that the revolutionary parties of that time - CPI (ML) and MCC adopted the above practice. The general understanding of the revolutionary party at that time was that the destruction of the semi-feudal relations in India would pave the way for the downfall of the caste system.

In the first four to five years of the Naxalbari struggle, annihilation of the class enemy was considered the only form of struggle. After the suppression of the Naxalbari upsurge by 1972, revolutionary movement critically evaluated the left adventurist line it was following and did self-criticism and adopted a mass line. A new wave of anti-feudal struggles engulfed many areas in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar. While land struggles with the slogan of land to the tiller were launched right away in some places, while in many other places social struggles and self-respect struggles were taken up first and they gave way to land struggles.

These struggles taught the upper caste people to address the lower caste people with respect instead of calling them in derogatory terms. In some places they started calling the lower caste people Dada (brother), Didi (sister), and in some places they started adding the respectful suffix '*Ji* ' to the name. In many villages in Telangana, downtrodden castes stopped denigrating themselves while addressing the upper caste people. Instead the upper caste landlords also started addressing the revolutionary leaders from the oppressed castes, the radical young men and women, the leaders of Peasants and Agricultural Workers Association as Dada and Didi. In some places there were demeaning practices such as making Dalits hold their sandals in hands while walking in front of the landlords' houses,

maintaining separate glasses for Dalits in hotels, preventing the marriage processions of Dalits from taking the main streets of the villages etc. In some places, oppressed caste people had to perform certain dances etc. during festival times first in front of the landlords' houses before doing so in front of their own streets or houses. The movement fought a lot to get rid of such demeaning practices and roused the self-respect among the Dalits and provided them with enough confidence to put a stop to such practices. Wherever necessary, it resorted to even street fights.

Revolutionaries made it a regular practice to wash their own plates after eating so as to lessen the burden on women. It is also done as a part of struggle against patriarchal practices. However, while eating in the houses of the dominant upper castes, traditionally the lower castes used to wash their own plates. If revolutionaries wash their plates it would continue that prevailing discriminatory practice. Therefore, a decision was made not to wash their own plates in the houses of upper castes. Although the women of those houses have more work to do here, such a decision was taken because the fight to be waged against the hegemonic culture of caste was more important than the fight against patriarchy. Hundreds of such small practices became common during the revolution.

The next article 'Caste-Theory and Praxis of the Revolutionary Movement', in this book, talks in detail how the revolutionary party's understanding of caste has undergone changes during the past five decades. Therefore, it is not explained again here in this article.

The relationship between the annihilation of caste and the new democratic revolution needs to be looked at in detail.

Throughout the feudal period before the British took over our country, caste had close relation with the mode of production. That is why we characterize Indian feudalism as caste-based feudalism. This means that in a feudal society, land ownership, which is the main means of production, was in the hands of certain upper castes, while the laborers and other producers (artisans) who worked on the land belonged to the *Shudra* and *Ati-Shudra* castes. This was the general state of affairs. Over the centuries, some changes took place in it, but the general condition remained the same.

During the period when the British ruled our country for more than two centuries, certain changes took place in the feudal relations, and due to the entry of colonial capital, capitalist relations also made an entry to some extent. The close relationship existing between caste and mode of production had undergone major changes. Industrial working class emerged from among the Dalits. An educated urban middle class also emerged from among them for the first time in history. Out of the Shudra agricultural castes arose the middle class peasants, rich peasants and a small landlord class. Due to the introduction of English education by the British, education, which was available only to the upper castes until then, became available to the Shudras and Dalits as well. Consciousness arose among the Dalits and Shudra castes about their natural rights and they started fighting for their rights. This gave birth to the anti-Brahmin movements. The freedom struggle against the British, the socialist movements in Europe and the nationality movements all aroused national consciousness and democratic feelings in the middle class and a section of the bourgeoisie in India. This had significant effect on the educated people from lower castes too. This raised awareness about their rights as the oppressed castes. There were also many peasant movements. All these brought about changes in class composition.

After the colonial rule ended these changes picked up momentum.

The Naxalbari struggle and the ensuing revolutionary movement directly brought about changes in land relations in many states. In many places new landlord sections emerged in place of the old landlords. This too brought about changes in the caste composition of the classes. In order to wean away the people from the revolutionary movement, land ceiling acts were enacted by the Central and State Governments. Even though they were implemented very weakly and only nominally, they also caused some changes in the land relations. The strong interrelationship between castes and classes (production system) was broken. Different classes emerged in all castes to a certain extent. With the result, caste interests and class interests have ceased to be one and the same. At the same time, the middle and the rich classes, belonging to the backward castes and the Dalits, who gradually gained economic power and social consciousness, started to fight for their share in political power, education and employment

etc. by raising the demands of reservations etc. Efforts to mobilize the people of their respective castes intensified in order to displace the upper caste people, who were dominant and occupying the positions of power in all the political parties till then. As the chances of mobilizing adequate number of people on individual caste basis are less, slogans such as Bahujan castes unity, Bahujan-Dalit unity, Bahujan-Dalit-minority unity etc. have come up. It is true that there is a democratic aspiration in this. This consciousness provided many sharp tools to question the supremacy of the upper castes. But there is also a serious problem with this. The common interest of all these castes is limited. It is primarily social in nature. There are many conflicting economic interests between these castes.

For example, when we look at the situation in rural areas today - we mentioned above that land has changed hands in rural areas in the last few decades. In many places land ownership has shifted to Shudra agricultural castes in place of the old upper castes. Their interests are not the same as those of the landless agricultural workers and poor farmers of the Dalit, and other backward castes. The slogan 'Land to the tiller' draws only the latter into struggles and not those who have already become land owners. Mutually exclusive interests are there in the case of struggles over wage rates.

Today class differentiation has taken place even among the Dalits. Industrial working class, middle class, and especially urban middle class have emerged among the Dalits too. A small bourgeois class has also emerged comprising big bureaucrats like IAS and IPS officers, big politicians and a few industrialists, albeit very small in number. However, in the villages, they are mainly landless and poor farmers though in some places some of them turned into middle class. With so many class divisions, the interest of all these classes is not the same. This has been proven many times in practice. The same is broadly applicable in respect of other backward castes. Even then, so far as Dalits are concerned, it can be said that the caste-class correspondence continues, especially in rural areas. This applies to some of the most backward castes too who are still economically and socially almost on par with the Dalit castes.

In view of these changed economic conditions, caste and class are not entirely one and the same. However, the unity of the oppressed castes

to the extent that they fight against social, and cultural discrimination and oppression, against the Brahminical and *Manuvada* culture and the hegemony of the oppressor upper castes is completely reasonable and correct. It does contribute in the struggle for caste annihilation. But due to the above mentioned differences of interests, 'Unity of the Bahujan Castes' of the BSP type is useful only for parliamentary politics but not for caste eradication. *Manuvada* Hindutva politics has gained a foothold in many backward castes because there are different interests between and even within different backward castes. It cannot be denied that lack of consciousness and influence of Hindutva propaganda play a very important role in this. But if we do not recognize the differing interests and the changes in class composition, we cannot take the struggle for the annihilation of caste in the right direction.

There is another important factor to be taken into consideration. Ninety percent of the biggest billionaires belonging to the comprador big bourgeoisie belong to the upper castes. It is they who play the dominant role in the ruling class today. It should also be known that they will not relinquish their position without an uncompromising revolutionary struggle with this class. Without fighting against corporatization and increasing privatization in all sectors, livelihood and even survival has become a very hard task for the majority of the oppressed castes. No parliamentary party with backward caste and Dalit leadership has the vision and program to put these issues on the agenda.

This is the inherent logic of Anand Teltumbde's argument, when he says that the unity of oppressed castes is not possible on the basis of caste but it should be done on the basis of class.

The unity of oppressed castes and classes on the basis of class implies that the struggles carried out by the oppressed classes should encompass all struggles against caste oppression and hegemony. The fight against caste domination and discrimination should be carried out with special focus, special programs and special organizational structures.

Let us now look at the program for the eradication of caste taken up by the revolutionary party that follows the path of new democratic revolution.

The caste system is strongly linked to the mode of production since its inception. But it also formed a social framework beyond the mode of production as it existed for thousands of years. At the same time it is also an ideological system that is culturally ingrained in the people. So the struggle against it should go on simultaneously in these two fields. Caste does not go away by characterizing it as a special aspect of Hinduism and leaving that religion or if we fight against it only culturally and ideologically. A caste system with modifications suitable for today's needs is beneficial not only to the feudal system but also to capitalist interests. It is useful both economically and politically. In the caste system, low payments to the lower castes, and *begar* (corvee) are accepted forms in the society. These facilitate the payment of low wages for allegedly low-level work in a capitalist system. We see that it is the people from the lower castes who are engaged in a big way in certain types of work - for example, sanitation and scavenging work, work that involves a lot of physical labor - and that too for the lowest wages. Needless to say, this surplus exploitation brings a lot more profits to the capitalists. Any division of labourers that undermines the unity of the working class will benefit the ruling classes. So, caste system is very beneficial to the capitalist system politically as well. That is why even though capitalist relations are increasing, the present system is nurturing caste system, caste divisions, casteism, caste feelings and caste feuds day in and day out.

Therefore, we will be able to remove the base for the caste system by radically changing the relations of production that sustain this caste system i.e. semi-feudal and semi-colonial relations through the new democratic revolution. Ambedkar's declared goal of 'Nationalization of Land' can only be achieved through a new democratic revolution by 'Socializing the land'. The goal of the new democratic revolution is to first make the tillers the real owners of the land and raise the consciousness of the farmers by taking up collective farming and cooperative farming and ultimately socializing the land. The aim of the new democratic revolution is to socialize not only the land but also the industries which are gaining importance day by day in the Indian economy. Communizing the means of production in this way means radically changing the relations of production that are the

basis of the caste system. The caste system does not end by this alone. It continues even after the revolution in a relatively independent framework. So even after the revolution, we have to continue the struggle in the cultural, social and ideological fields. Struggle in these areas will be facilitated by the radical dismantling of the present economic and political system which fosters the caste system.

The caste based division of occupations which is continuing even now will also be abolished by the new democratic state led by the working class. Capitalist system has already changed this caste based division of occupations to a large extent to suit its needs. The occupations considered as 'lowly' and menial, but nevertheless, required by the society are still carried out only by the Dalits and lower castes. Technology is available today to do as much of this as possible with machines and robots. Yet, the ruling class of this country is not making that technology and those machines available to mechanize the work, even while always boasting that 'India is showing the prowess to sit at the table of the developed countries'. The new democratic state will pay special attention to bring them into wider and common use and to further develop them. Apart from that, it will make it compulsory for everyone to undertake these tasks regardless of caste. Various steps will be taken for this. It will adopt various forms of positive discrimination policies including reservations in all sectors to the extent necessary and for as long as necessary till social gaps are removed. Today, society considers mental labor as superior and physical labor as inferior. But the proletarian State takes all kinds of policy decisions, including economic policies, to close the gap between physical and mental labor. Along with this, it will make every effort to culturally challenge and close this gap that is ingrained in the minds of people.

In the name of honor killings, today's upper caste supremacist and religious fanatical killings are being indirectly encouraged or ignored by the present state. But the working-class state not only provides all kinds of safeguards against such incidents from happening but also actively encourages inter-caste and inter-religious marriages. All necessary ideological, cultural, anti-Brahminist, anti-*Manuvaad* propaganda and actions will be taken to make them quite common. If the inter-caste marriages

become a regular occurrence, then it is a sign of complete abolition of the caste system.

To complete all these tasks, special organisational structures will be formed in all the departments of government and party, mass organisations and production units.

Thus –

* Change the mode of production which is the material basis for the caste system – that is to say, distribution of the land based on the 'land to the tiller' slogan and socialization of all the industries of comprador bureaucratic big bourgeoisie; and take up steps so that their management lies in the true sense in the hands of the working class.
* Caste has and continues to have a relatively independent existence as a set of social relations along with its material basis in the mode of production. The new state will take up necessary legal steps to break that social framework.
* Along with this, efforts will be made to bring about changes in ideological, cultural, social, literary and linguistic fields and abolish caste discrimination and caste inequalities.
* All steps will be taken so that all occupations are carried out by all the people irrespective of their castes.
* Eradicate inequalities between physical and mental activities, between different physical activities and between mental activities and establish equal value between them.
* It will be made compulsory for everybody to partake in sanitation and 'dirty' works as a social responsibility and thereby remove the stigma attached to it and improve the dignity of labour about those works. The conditions whereby only the lower caste people do what are considered 'dirty' jobs will be eradicated.
* Steps will be taken to put a stop to the practice of caste-Hindus residing in the main village and the Dalits in the outer village. Similarly, steps will be taken to eliminate such practices of segregation which still exist in other forms in urban areas too.

* A scientific and uniform education system will be adopted in place of the present 'graded education system' that perpetrates many kinds of discrimination.
* Take all measures to ensure that inter-caste marriages become very common
* Annihilation of caste is possible only by taking it up as a major agenda of the cultural revolution which would continue even after the revolution.

Such a long struggle is necessary for the annihilation of caste.

So the argument that revolution is possible only if caste is eradicated is not a correct argument. It will be like tying a horse behind the cart. Only when the economic and political systems that nurture the caste system are overthrown through revolution, it is possible to destroy the social framework of caste and the foundation for the annihilation of caste is laid.

This does not mean that we should not fight for the abolition of caste today and postpone it until the revolution succeeds. Even today, social, economic, political, cultural and ideological struggles should continue. A sharp fight should be waged against Brahmanism and *Manuvaad* that is emerging in the form of Hindutva.

Fight against caste during the course of revolutionary movement:

The revolution cannot be successful without achieving the unity of all working people regardless of caste. Peasants, workers, other toilers, unemployed, underemployed, small traders, small industrialists of different castes including the upper castes are the victims of today's semi-colonial, semi-feudal system. As the financial crisis worsens in our country and around the world and as privatization and corporatization increase, the exploitation of and oppression on these groups is increasing. Their common interests lie in fighting against the privatization and corporatization. It is these common interests that form the basis for the oppressed people of different castes to come together to fight on a class basis. That basis is strengthening by the day. It is a fact that the revolutionary movement has

significantly achieved the unity of such oppressed people across castes. It is also a great achievement of the revolution.

Achieving this unity under the leadership of the oppressed castes in the peasant-agricultural workers associations, Youth organisations and other mass organisations is an even greater achievement. It is also a fact that it has been able to mobilize democratic activists of all castes in support of the struggles of the oppressed classes and castes. When the units of the revolutionary party were led by members of the oppressed castes, they could win the confidence of all. The practice of revolutionary movement proves that the unity of the oppressed castes is possible on class basis and only on that basis the leadership of the oppressed castes can be established. While all this is one aspect of the issue, it is also indisputable that along with regional, ethnic, religious and tribal barriers, caste differences are also one of the most important obstacles in uniting the working people. It is a must to fight against these inequalities and discrimination even now. In that struggle, the ideas and thoughts brought forward by different identity movements should be adopted. Only then can we strengthen the program of caste eradication both theoretically and practically. At the same time, we should reject various 'post' arguments like post modernism, post-structuralism, post-truth etc. and the 'extreme tendencies' in the identity movement which reject the class struggle, class outlook etc. and stand as an obstacle to the unity of all the working people and the new democratic revolution. At the same time, this struggle against casteist tendencies or upper caste supremacist tendencies should be carried out among the activists of the various revolutionary mass organisations and the revolutionaries. That struggle should be waged organisationally, individually and even in their families. But it should also be recognized that without changes in the system, there will be limitations to such struggles. Otherwise, there is a possibility of an illusion that this is a matter of 'individual' change in the people or that it is only a social struggle to be waged only socially ignoring the economic root.

In the 1990s many developments took place that transformed parliamentary politics vis-à-vis caste dynamics. Mandal Commission report was implemented; Bahujan Samaj Party gained strength and even captured

power in a big state like Uttar Pradesh; RJD, Janata Dal and Samajwadi parties too came to power in Bihar and UP under the leadership of backward caste leaders by overthrowing hitherto dominant castes like Brahmin, Rajput, Kayastha etc. With the overthrow of the political dominance of the upper castes, the belief and illusion that Bahujans and Dalits can take power through parliamentary politics has strengthened. BSP could not come to power except in Uttar Pradesh. In Punjab, which has a higher percentage of Dalits than Uttar Pradesh (though Kanshiram himself hails from Punjab), the BSP has not been able to exert any political influence. Anand Teltumbde says that the reason for this is the special caste composition among Uttar Pradesh Dalits (existence of a large number of Jatavs, a caste to which Mayawati belongs). However, even after assuming such power, BSP could not bring any significant change at least in the lives of Dalits. Such a change is not possible without changing the present semi-feudal; semi-colonial system. It is not even possible to exercise parliamentary power even at the state level without compromising with that system and serving it obediently. The ruling class will not allow that. That is the reason why some backward castes with greater numerical strength could climb up one or two rungs in the ladder of caste system by gaining power in a few states and even obtained a share in the power at the Centre, but none of them is working to eradicate caste. They are promoting caste ideology for their vote bank politics. Moreover , they do not care about the difference between the parliamentary power and the state power. These parties working with limited interests cannot be expected to understand the difference and work accordingly for the true state power of Dalits and Bahujans. It is because of this confidence that the big-bourgeoisie, the feudal class and the capitalist peasantry belonging to the upper castes approve the cooption of a section of the Dalit, Bahujans into their class. They hope to keep alive the illusion of Dalit-Bahujans in the parliamentary system for a long time by such cooption.

The interests of the Bahujan parties, organizations and individuals who want to be a part of the ruling class and obtain a piece of the pie are different from those of the people and organizations who wholeheartedly desire Ambedkar's ambition to eradicate caste. Those who sincerely hope

to end all exploitations including the abolition of caste and the exploitation of labor and establish an equal society should realize that the way is not the parliamentary way but the new democratic revolutionary way. It should be realized that only then the oppressed classes and also the oppressed castes can take real state power. So, even while carrying out the necessary critical dialogue and criticism from the angle of the oppressed castes, they should become an integral part of the new democratic revolution and the organisational structures that build and sustain that revolution.

Significance of Armed Resistance:

In our country, in the seventies, and even in the eighties and nineties, landlords used to wield all types of economic, political and social dominance and power in the rural areas. These landlords mainly belonged to the upper castes. When Dalits, backward caste toilers and even upper caste workers became conscious of their rights and questioned the supremacy of the landlords, the landlords used their economic strength, political influence, their grip on the organs of state power, and used their armed force to carry out brutal attacks in many places in the country. Most brutal massacres were carried out in many villages in many states such as Keelavenmani in Tamil Nadu; in Karamchedu, Chundur, Lakshimpet in Andhra Pradesh; in Belchi, Pipra and other villages in Bihar. In Bihar, many private armies of upper castes were established and massacres were carried out with the tacit encouragement of the state.

There is no count of the atrocities committed by them in the villages of Telangana both inside and outside their *gadies* (feudal fortresses). It was mainly the revolutionary movement that resisted those attacks heroically. The revolution did not limit the struggles just to the court battles. It recognized the limitations of the legal struggle and took up armed and militant struggles. In all these struggles, including the armed resistance, the revolutionaries of all castes, regardless of their caste, proved that their class-bonds are way stronger than any narrow caste-bonds by dedicating their lives to those struggles. Many even gave up their lives in these struggles. The movement mobilized Dalits and Bahujans in all the struggles and was able to unite the democratic activists of all castes in solidarity with those struggles. It is only such organized struggles by people belonging to all

castes that pave the way for the abolition of caste. Those struggles were able to check the attacks and atrocities of the landlords. Even while fighting the legal battles, we will be able to protect the rights of Dalits, Bahujans, other workers and tribals only by fighting beyond the limits of legal battles.

Leadership of the Oppressed Castes:

Even from the period of Naxalbari struggle, it was the policy of the party to pro-actively make the landless and poor peasants and agricultural workers the leaders of the people's organs of state power built at village level, wherever and whenever they are built. Therefore, in thousands of villages it is the Dalits and people from backward castes who lead the peasants and agricultural workers associations initially and the revolutionary peasant committees and revolutionary public committees later. The decisions made by these committees in the villages under their leadership had to be obeyed by the upper caste landlords too. Thus, for the first time in history, power was wielded by the Dalits and the backward castes. It is the revolutionary movement that made this possible.

Compared to any other parliamentary or leftist party, the participation of the oppressed castes in the leadership of the revolutionary movement also increased significantly during these five or six decades. The number and proportion of people from Dalit, Adivasi and backward caste backgrounds has increased not only at the district and state levels, but also at the central level. Even in the leadership of mass organizations, which are accused by the State, of being affiliated to the revolutionary movement, the leadership is mostly from the oppressed castes. This is discussed in a more detailed manner in another article 'Caste-Theory and Praxis of the Revolutionary movement', compiled in this book.

When analysed in the context of the above understanding and practice, it can be clearly seen that caste annihilation is possible only through the path of new democratic revolution and not through the parliamentary electoral politics.

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Caste – Theory and Praxis of the Revolutionary Movement

The question of caste, its place in Marxist Theory and practice has been under debate for the past many decades. Both Ambedkarite and Marxist scholars have debated this question.

Questions have been raised if Marxism and Marxist methodology have tools to understand and annihilate caste – which is a specific feature of Indian society. The position often taken by many Marxist scholars and some communist parties has not helped in clearing such doubts. However, there is the question of communist revolutionaries (Naxalites), who from the time of the Naxalbari revolt 52 years back have had their theory of semi-feudal and semi-colonial India and agrarian revolution as the axis of the New Democratic Revolution. Anybody who professes that India is semi-feudal must deal with the question of caste, for as soon as one steps into any village in India one is confronted with the question of caste. So, communist revolutionaries cannot be blind to this fact. If there are any forces among the communists, who have mobilized hundreds of thousands of masses belonging to the oppressed castes and especially Dalits against feudalism and caste oppression, then it is the Naxalites.

We do not have many studies where the scholars have been able to study the theoretical positions taken by these revolutionaries (Maoists) and how their positions have changed over the decades both in response to their experience and to the theoretical debates over the issue. Studies regarding the practice of the Maoists vis-à-vis caste are still fewer. Many debates regarding the theoretical position of Marxists have been limited to the positions taken by the parliamentary left parties.

Therefore, in this paper, we would like to take up this question, especially with regard to the changes in the theoretical position and resultant

practice of the Naxalites over the past five decades. We would also like to address some of the criticisms raised regarding this.

How did the early Naxalites view the caste question and what was their practice?

Before we venture into answering this question, let us briefly examine the position of various castes in the villages as it existed by late sixties when the Naxalbari struggle broke out.

India was a caste based feudal society before the advent of the British. But many anti-feudal struggles and many anti-Brahmanical struggles especially in South India led to some changes in this status.

Most of the land was concentrated in the hands of landlords belonging to upper castes. Ninety percent of the Dalits were landless agricultural workers or poor peasants. Peasants of agricultural Sudra castes were either tenants or poor and middle farmers. Many from these castes were also landless agricultural workers or poor peasants. Two decades of the façade of land reform legislations had not brought about much change in the land equations by that time. So, though there were many exceptions, there was a close correspondence between class and caste. Nevertheless, the process of a section of peasants of agricultural Sudra castes becoming middle and rich peasants and even landlords had begun, especially in places where anti-feudal and anti-Brahmanical struggles had broken out, for e.g. in South India. The political and economic power was held by the upper caste landlords and the social power by these castes as a whole. Gradual economic strengthening of the intermediary farmers enabled them to be politically assertive especially in those states where anti-Brahmanical struggles have a history. In some areas the economic and political power had started shifting to the middle castes, especially to the rich peasants of these castes.

As far as the urban classes go, comprador big bourgeoisie was almost entirely comprised of Banias and Parsis.

The political leadership of all the parties, including that of the communist parties belonged primarily to those coming from upper caste background or from middle and rich classes of Muslims. Having been imparted with modern education, inspired by nationalism and later by

socialist consciousness they became communist revolutionary leaders. While some of them became true revolutionaries, many such as PC Joshi and SA Dange could not shed their Brahmanical ideological outlook. They and the subsequent leadership of the Communist Party of India withdrew the Telangana armed struggle and the concept of revolution was given a slow burial.

Naxalbari Revolt:

The Great Debate and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution inspired many communist revolts in many countries of the world, including in India. Naxalbari revolt took place by breaking clear of the 'revisionist leadership and ideology' of CPI and CPI(M). Inspired by Naxalbari, revolts took place in many places in the country, prominent among them being Srikakulam, Debra, Gopi-Ballabhpur, Musahari etc. To provide leadership to these struggles and to lead new democratic revolution in India, CPI (ML) was formed on 22nd April, 1969. Maoist Communist Centre was also formed as a separate revolutionary party on 22nd October, the same year.

These parties described the Indian society as a semi-feudal and semi-colonial society and the contradiction between feudalism and the broad Indian masses as the principal contradiction. They laid down protracted people's war as the strategy of revolution and described agrarian revolution as the axle of the New Democratic Revolution. Resolving the principal contradiction between feudalism and the broad masses meant in the main the implementation of the policy of 'land to the tiller', smashing the political power of the feudal class (and the comprador big bourgeoisie class) and establishing the political power of the oppressed classes under the leadership of the proletariat and landless and poor peasantry.

The feudal gentry that wielded the economic and political power in the countryside in those days in most places belonged to the upper castes. On the other hand, 95% of the landless and poor peasantry belonged to the oppressed backward castes and Dalits. Therefore, smashing feudalism in essence meant smashing the base of the caste system, on which it has stood for the past nearly three thousand years.

The founder leader of CPI (ML), Charu Mazumdar gave a call to the

students to 'go to the villages'. He gave a direction to the students and the revolutionary party activists to take shelter first and foremost in the huts and houses of the landless and poor peasantry and especially 'Harijans' when they went to the villages to organize the rural oppressed masses. 'Harijans', being subject to economic, political and social oppression for many centuries will be the most determined to smash the feudalism and feudal authority and moreover, the political power will be safer in their hands. It is with this understanding that CPI (ML) had given such a call. Inspired by this clarion call, thousands of students and youth participated in revolutionary upsurges in many areas of the country. When the communist revolutionaries went to the villages to initiate organisational work, they immediately confronted the issues of caste oppression and they organised people to resolve it. This was the situation almost everywhere. In these upsurges, it was the 'Harijans' and other oppressed caste masses who were in the forefront in the anti-feudal struggles under the leadership of the revolutionaries. At the same time, we should not forget the fact that the ranks of the revolutionaries comprised of people from all castes including upper castes, who were ready to lay down their lives for the cause of liberation from feudal and imperialist oppression. Though all this had happened at that time only on the basis of class, the revolutionaries had clarity of understanding even in those days that the most oppressed castes mainly comprise the most oppressed classes. Thus, they were clear about the relationship between the oppression of the feudal classes and the base of the feudal power.

Naxalbari upsurge had lasted for only a small period from 1967 to 1972, the year of Charu Majumdar's martyrdom.

During this period,

* Caste was seen as an integral part of feudalism;
* Interrelationship between the smashing of this system and caste annihilation was recognized;
* Call was given to lead peasant revolts by basing themselves on the oppressed castes and especially Dalits who comprise the bulk of the landless and poor peasants;
* A clear direction was given to see that the leadership of the

revolutionary peasant committees, which would act as the organs of power, rests in the hands of the oppressed castes. This call was implemented sincerely.

* The then leadership did not have any plans to chalk out a separate programme to fight caste by discussing the caste question in detail, apart from mobilizing the people of oppressed castes into anti-feudal struggle.
* Smashing feudalism itself was considered adequate to get rid of caste in the society.

We should however recognize that the leadership then did not have much scope for rectifying this shortcoming by chalking out a separate programme for annihilation of caste in those days.

At the same time, we should also recognize another shortcoming. The leadership of CPI(ML) was highly critical of Gandhi, but did not see anything wrong in using the word 'Harijan' coined by the same Gandhi instead of using the word 'Dalit' coined by Ambedkar to denote the 'untouchable' castes.

In those days, revolutionaries led many social revolts albeit at micro-level. Social ostracism of the Dalits was fought. Taboos like Dalits should not wear footwear in front of feudal lords and upper caste people were broken. Dalits used to enter the houses of the upper caste people as the leaders of armed squads etc. All these laid a firm basis for the class unity among the oppressed castes and classes.

Those who mechanically understand that class outlook and class struggle mean only economic struggles argue that those revolutionaries fought only on the basis of class outlook and did not bother about caste. But struggle against all social and cultural oppression is an integral part of class struggle. So, though the revolutionaries then did not have any comprehensive understanding on the caste question, they resisted the social atrocities of the landlords on the oppressed castes with the basic socialist understanding that all humans are equal. This was a strong point of their practice and it is because of this, they could acquire a strong mass base among the Dalits and the exploited classes among the other backward castes.

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The second phase of the revolutionary movement started by rectifying the left adventurist tactics of the first phase of the Naxalbari revolt. During this period, many revolutionary and democratic mass organisations were formed and students, youth, peasants, workers, Adivasis, employees, intellectuals, and women were mobilized in a big way into many struggles on their specific issues as well as on political issues.

Let us examine this in some detail especially in the case of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

Thousands of students and youth were mobilized in 'Go to Villages' campaigns under the leadership of Radical Students Union and Radical Youth League every year from 1977 (after the lifting of emergency) till 1984. Educational classes were conducted for the students and youth before they went to the villages about not only New Democratic Politics and land issue and other peasant issues but also about how to rely on the basic classes in the villages during this campaign period and about how to understand the caste question. The success of the campaign was measured in the number of days the campaigners took shelter among the Dalits in their Tolas or Vaadaas (hamlets) and won their confidence. Thousands of youths, both men and women, campaigned against exploitation, and social oppression by staying and mingling with the basic classes and Dalits by eating whatever they were offered and sometimes even going without food. They accomplished all of this amidst cruel repression and police attacks. This won the confidence of the Dalits and other oppressed masses and classes, which laid a strong basis for launching innumerable struggles on various issues and for the revolutionary movement.

Exploited and oppressed classes were mobilized against feudalism in the villages and against capitalist exploitation in towns and cities. There was a conscious and planned effort to focus work among the basic classes belonging to Dalits and other oppressed castes. This laid the basis for strong agrarian revolutionary movement. Apart from taking up people's issues like abolition of bonded labour, hike in the wages of the labourers and bonded labourers, return of the money the landlords seized and agrarian revolutionary issues like the seizure of wastelands and government lands, seizure of the landlord's lands; social issues like untouchability, caste

discrimination, atrocities on the Dalits were also taken up. Thus, unity among the Dalit-backward castes and the poor and the middle class people of the upper castes could be achieved. Revolutionary movement mobilized and organized the people belonging to Dalit and other backward castes politically and in the process took up many struggles to destroy the upper caste chauvinism, social, political, economic and cultural domination of the upper caste feudal forces and could instill self-confidence in the oppressed castes. Depending on the strength of the movement in areas where the Party worked, abusing in the name of caste, addressing the Dalit masses in an insulting and humiliating manner were almost totally or to a large extent stopped.

Consciousness that caste should be annihilated struck roots in the mass organizations to varying degrees, and therefore thousands of activists had inter-caste marriages. Because of the support of the revolutionary movement to these marriages, the so called 'honour killings' (upper-caste chauvinistic murders) were never heard of. This effort was carried on both in the rural as well as urban areas. The literature and various art forms and songs have captured these changes and transformation in various ways.

Conscious efforts were made to bring the poor and the middle classes of the Dalit-backward castes into leadership positions in not only the agricultural labourer organisations/ Krantikari Kisan Committees but also in the youth, women and cultural organisations and to attain recognition for them among the people. In the urban mass organisations also, leadership from similar castes was developed. The upper castes too inevitably had to accept the political role this leadership had in the village affairs. Thus, gradually the unity among the poor and the middle classes developed and the democratic struggle for the annihilation of caste built up.

Many struggles were taken up against the class exploitation, oppression and domination by the landlord and other oppressive forces and against social untouchability, atrocities, suppression and physical attacks in the rural areas of many states in the country. When the feudal upper caste chauvinist forces massacred Dalits in Bihar and Andhra Pradesh, revolutionary party and mass organisations stood very firmly on behalf of the victims and took up large-scale propaganda and protest activities

exposing these cruelties. The guerilla forces of the party wiped out such reactionary forces in places like Senari, Dalel Chak-Bhagoura and Karamchedu. In Bihar, starting from the end of the 1970s until 2010s, feudal upper caste forces formed their own private armies like Brahmarshi Sena, Bhoomi Sena, Savarna Liberation Front, Sunlight Sena, Ranaveer Sena and other such armies with the support of the political parties and the state-administration. These private armies resorted to medieval-type massacres and numerous atrocities on Dalits and other oppressed castes and classes with the objective of eliminating the revolutionary movement.

Many Dalit leaders and parties on the one hand criticize that 90% of the judiciary is filled up by those belonging to the upper castes, thus blaming the judiciary for the poor conviction rate in such caste massacres. But at the same time, the Dalit movements have illusions regarding parliamentary democracy and limit themselves only to legal struggles without mobilizing the Dalits into militant struggles, even though in almost all the cases of massacres, the perpetrators are left scot free by the judiciary at one or the other level. On the other hand, apart from mobilizing the affected sections in various legal struggles, revolutionary movement went beyond that and mobilized them into people's armed squads and physically defeated and smashed these private armies.

Without giving due recognition to all the above-described struggles and the inherent caste annihilation nature of these struggles, some constantly criticize the revolutionary movement that it is limited only to economic struggles, and does not bother about the caste question. One can see the fallacy of the argument if one sincerely considers the above described practice.

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This period also saw the caste question addressed theoretically in a more comprehensive manner.

This question was debated in the 'Agrarian Revolution' document (1979) of the then People's War party.

'Why shouldn't one consider the contradiction between the Dalits and the upper castes as the principal contradiction and carry out the agrarian revolution based on that formulation?' This question was posed and

answered in the document. Though 90% of the power is concentrated in the hands of the upper castes, not all those belonging to the upper castes wield power. Moreover, more than half of the upper caste people are neither landlords nor the big bourgeoisie. So if the contradiction between the upper castes and the Dalits is considered as the principal contradiction, then what about these masses? On the other hand, though 95% of the Dalits and 75% of the backward caste people do not possess any means of production and can be mobilized into the revolution, there is a section, albeit small, which has clawed its way up into the oppressor class. In many states, some landlords and rich peasantry and the capitalists belonging to the OBCs have formed state governments and are wielding considerable clout even in the Centre, which means that there are sections belonging to the exploiting classes even among the castes that are exploited. Therefore, it would be wrong to propose the contradiction in the above manner. Thus, the document discussed the relation between class and caste.

Radical Students Movement was very clear from the beginning about the stand to be adopted towards reservations. When anti-reservation movement broke out in Gujarat in 1981, RSU firmly supported the reservations, even while exposing its limitations. It did not reject the reservations on the basis that they are merely reforms.

People's War party had sent a solidarity message to the second RYL conference in 1979. In its call to the youth, the party explained as to how the youth should understand the caste question.

"Comrades! Our country comprises of many nationalities, religions and also castes.....All the castes of Andhra Pradesh can be divided into two categories. The castes that possess land and wield power over the rural masses belong to one category. Most of the landlords belong to this category of castes. The second category of castes does not possess any land or possesses only meagre land and are mainly dependent on agricultural work for their livelihood. Dalits and most backward castes belong to this category.

Therefore, the castes can be broadly divided into those of landlords and peasants and those of agricultural workers. Population-wise those belonging to the agricultural worker castes are far more numerous.

Therefore, without mobilizing the youth belonging to these castes, apart from the youth of the peasant castes, and imparting them with revolutionary consciousness, new democratic revolution can never be successful. Without this, united front of all the rural exploited classes against feudalism can never be built.

The issue of Harijans among the agricultural workers is not only the main issue but also a special issue. They are facing not only economic exploitation, but are facing social and cultural oppression in many forms. Not a day passes without one or another atrocity on the Harijans....

Youth Organizations have to mobilize the youth of all castes to resist the atrocities perpetuated by the landlord sections on the Harijans. The youth belonging to the upper castes can fulfill this task only when they de-castify themselves and get rid of their upper caste arrogance. By mobilizing the youth belonging to all the castes in the youth organization, the conspiracy of the landlords to divide the oppressed class people to perpetuate their hegemony over the villages can be defeated. Thus, the youth organization should act as a lever to the united front of the rural oppressed masses against feudalism. Only then you can play the requisite role in mobilizing the youth for new democratic revolution in our country that comprises of vast number of castes."

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Discussion and debate started in Andhra Pradesh in the late 80s about the theory and practice of the revolutionary parties vis-à-vis the caste question. This debate grew further in the 90s and continues to this day. The Dalit movement that started in the mid-80s raised some new questions. Considerable increase of the middle class and intellectuals among the Dalits by the 80s acted as a catalyst for this. Almost at the same time, the rise of post-modernist theory in the western world denouncing the communist ideology also gave an impetus to this.

The main criticisms which this debate raised are:

* that communists including the Naxalites have neglected the caste question;
* that they have clubbed together class and caste and have postponed the struggle against the caste system by saying that

caste can be eliminated only if the system changes;

* that while the Dalits and Bahujans are getting killed in the revolutionary movement, the leadership is concentrated in the hands of those hailing from the upper castes.

Any revolutionary party that sincerely adopts mass line has to address any genuine questions raised by any section of the society – be it the feminists or the Dalits or somebody else. The positive aspects of the critique have to be adopted even while analyzing and announcing its stand from a Marxist perspective. Therefore, the questions raised by the Dalit and Bahujan intellectuals inspired the revolutionary parties to deeply study the caste question and develop a comprehensive understanding to devise programmes for annihilation of caste.

The then People's War and the Party Unity parties released documents about their perspective on caste question. They also took up programmes to conduct classes for the rank and file to better their understanding on the question. They also built special organizational structures and organizations to address the caste question.

The Maoist Party, which was formed in 2004, by the merger of People's War and the Maoist Communist Centre of India, also released its perspective document on the caste question a few years back. It incorporated its understanding about the caste question and the caste annihilation programme as an inherent part of the party's basic documents – the strategy and tactics and the party programme. How to fight the caste even in the post-revolutionary society was also made an integral part of these basic documents.

Some Important aspects of these documents:

* The feudalism that has dominated Indian society for thousands of years is rigid caste-based feudalism that was built on a Brahmanical ideology.
* This pernicious caste system was of enormous value to extract large surplus from the oppressed, particularly the so-called outcastes, who were pushed to a slave-like condition. (Party Program, Page 1)
* The Caste system is not only a super-structural phenomenon but also a part of the economic base.
* Caste oppression and Brahmanism are inextricably interwoven with the existing semi-feudal, semi-colonial system in the country. For this reason, the destruction of the caste system, including the eradication of untouchability, combined with a struggle against all manifestations of Brahmanism, is a necessary part of the New Democratic Revolution (NDR) in the country.
* Though the Dalit question is in essence a class question, the Party should lead the struggle against caste oppression of Dalits and other backward castes as a part of New Democratic Revolution (NDR) and fight for their equal place in all spheres of social life by fighting all forms of caste discrimination and oppression, towards abolishing the caste system. (Party Program, Page 9)
* The Party must fight for equal rights, reservations and other special privileges for Dalits and other backward castes. These should be considered as an integral part of the struggle for democracy.
* The petty bourgeois Dalit sections in certain states have formed exclusive organizations of Dalits and are organising movements on some issues related to their problems. The Party should work jointly with these organizations on these issues while at the same time conducting ideological and political debate with them on their orientation towards reformist solutions to eradicate caste, such as conversion and reservations etc.
* Caste-based Feudalism and Comprador Bureaucratic Capitalism and Imperialism that are working as the bulwark for the caste system should be smashed by successfully completing New Democratic Revolution and objective conditions for the caste annihilation should be created.
* Eliminate Brahmanical, casteist, feudal, imperialist culture and establish genuine democratic and socialist culture that does not give way to untouchability and caste oppression and discrimination.

There is an important resolution passed in the First Unity Congress of the Maoist Party regarding some organisational steps to be taken to promote leadership from among the Dalits, Adivasis and other oppressed castes and minorities.

The Congress recognized the need to put in special efforts to increase the role of the comrades hailing from proletarian background, from socially oppressed and backward sections, especially those coming from basic classes, at all levels of the party.

1. Party should put in special effort to increase recruitment from workers and other exploited sections (Dalits, Women and Adivasis) into the ranks of the party.
2. Party should strive to increase the role of those coming from working class background and other exploited sections, especially hailing from basic classes in all leadership positions of the party and all forums of the party like party conferences, congress etc.
3. It is the policy of the party that when comrades have equal abilities in all aspects, then those from working class background should be given preference in promotion related aspects. It shall follow the same policy with regard to comrades hailing from Dalit, Adivasi background and women. This should be especially followed with regard to those coming from basic classes.
4. Party shall take up special measures in education and training to overcome the shortcomings that may be present in Dalit, Adivasi and women comrades owing to the discrimination and oppression they face in the society. With special measures, comrades hailing from these sections can develop capabilities to perform leadership role in the party. Central Committee and the state committees should plan for such special education and training programmes to develop these comrades to speedily enter into leadership positions.

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In the light of the above theoretical formulations, the criticism that "..... this theoretical position (of the Maoists) ..... forecloses the possibility of conceptualizing caste as the historical particularity of Indian society and adequately addressing it in practice" [K. Srinivasulu. Economic & Political Weekly, May 27, 2017 vol LLI no 21; pp 47-52] is not correct.

One criticism, which is frequently raised, is that while the Dalits, Adivasis, and Bahujans are shedding their blood in the revolutionary

movement, the upper caste people are occupying the leading positions of the party.

Emancipation demands more sacrifices from those classes or sections that fight for it. Therefore, it is but natural that when Dalits, Adivasis and Bahujans hailing from the exploited sections are fighting for their emancipation, their sacrifice of lives will be more. But to answer the above question with any semblance of honesty, one has to pose the question if the state has spared any revolutionaries just because they belonged to upper castes. The state did not spare any body right from Charu Majumdar to Kishenji or Azad, all of who belong to the upper castes.

Even from among those belonging to the mass organisations, the state, through vigilante gangs, cruelly murdered Mannem Prasad hailing from Dalit background. It did not spare Dr. Ramanatham, Purushottam or Ganti Prasadam just because they hailed from Brahmin caste. Even while arresting democratic rights activists, it did not differentiate between Sudheer Dhavale and Surendra Gadling, Sagar and others hailing from Dalit background and Varavara Rao, Sudha Bharadvaj and Shoma Sen hailing from Brahmin background. Nor did it spare Vernon Gonsalves, Arun Fereira, Rona Wilson and Stan Swamy who are from Christian background. The state and the ruling classes have clarity with regard to their enemies. It is a tragedy that some of the scholars do not have such clarity.

However, let us also see the changes occurring in the caste composition of the leadership of the revolutionary party.

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Revolutionary Movement and the Leadership from the Oppressed Castes:

Most of those who were elected to the central committee in the first congress of CPI (ML) belonged class wise to petti bourgeoisie and caste wise to upper castes. The same type of composition prevailed in various state committees and lower committees as well. Revolutionary movement was built with the conscious effort to build leadership from the basic classes. Hence, over a period of time, during the course of class struggles, those who hail from oppressed castes gradually came into leading positions in

both the mass organisations and the party committees. Sons and daughters of the soil and as Gramsci had put it, organic intellectuals (hailing from all caste backgrounds, but especially from the oppressed castes) gradually assumed leadership roles and the process is continuing.

Let us see the facts, a bit more concretely.

In the People's War party, it was K.G. Satyamurthy (SM), who was the top leader after Kondapally Seethaaramaiah (KS). He was admired not only as a top ranking party leader but also as an excellent poet, providing a great inspiration for revolutionary writers, artists and students. He hailed from Dalit Christian background. He became general secretary of the party after the arrest of KS and functioned in that capacity for a few years. Before he left the party because of some ideological and organisational issues, he was a leader admired by the whole rank and file of the party and mass organisations. The case of SM is well known in the revolutionary camp throughout India. But there is another lesser known top leader who hailed from a Dalit background.

After the initial setback of the Naxalbari movement throughout the country including Andhra Pradesh, the AP state committee reorganized revolutionary movement in Telangana. The North Telangana Regional Conference held in 1974 has a key historic role in this rebuilding of the movement. A three member regional committee was elected in that conference. In the pre-emergency period, it was the most crucial leading committee next only to the state committee. Ganapati, who later became the general secretary and led the party for 25 years, was only a member of this committee, while the secretary of that committee was Dr. Kolluri Chiranjeevi (who passed away on 8th March 2021). He hailed from Dalit background. He was however arrested within a short period after he was elected as the general secretary and did not continue in the revolutionary movement after his release. So, right in the initial years of the People's War party (although the name People's War was adopted only in 1980) two of its most important top leaders were Dalits.

Later, hundreds of leaders who emerged as the leaders of the revolutionary movement during the course of its growth were from the oppressed castes and classes. They emerged as very dear leaders of the

oppressed masses. They are innumerable in number. Dev Kumar Singh, a polit bureau member; Seelam Naresh, Rajamauli and Chandramauli, Ramanna central committee members; Puli Anjanna and Madhav, secretaries of AP state committee and dozens of state committee level leaders like Venkataswamy, Ailanna, Reddappa, Mahendar were from the oppressed Backward castes. Gajjela Gangaram, Jannu Chinnaalu, Peddi Shankar, Rameshwar, Haribhushan, Kairi Gangaram, Diwakar, Ramesh from Dalit backgrounds were very dear mass leaders and were district, regional and state level party leaders. There are also many women leaders, like Nyalakonda Rajita, Laxmi (Mahita), Ganjhu Urmila, Ajita, Tirupati Padma, Ellanki Aruna, from oppressed caste backgrounds. Some of them became state level party leaders and some were on the verge of becoming elected as the state level committee members. If they had not lost their lives in fake or real encounters, many among them would have risen to higher levels of leadership. (Here, we have given the names of only a very few. We have also not given the names of those who are alive though many of them are in higher leadership committees including polit-bureau and central committee).

It is the revolutionary movement, which has produced these excellent leaders. In Bihar, except those who initially went there from Bengal to begin revolutionary movement, 90% of those who emerged as leaders belong to backward castes, Dalits and Adivasis. Overwhelming majority of even those who became polit-bureau members and central committee members hail from OBCs, Dalits and Adivasis.

Even though persons from all caste backgrounds have led the mass organisations in AP and Telangana, majority of them were from oppressed caste backgrounds. For example- among the 15 students who were elected as presidents and secretaries in the ten conferences of RSU held between 1975 and 1993, while 7 hailed from upper caste background, 8 were from OBC and Dalit backgrounds. In the second and third conferences itself, a comrade from Dalit background was elected its secretary. In case of Radical Youth League, in the first three conferences a comrade from Dalit background was elected as its president. A comrade hailing from Dalit background was elected as the president of Agricultural workers and

Peasants Association in all the three conferences held. All the secretaries elected hailed from OBC background.

Conscious efforts were made to bring the poor and the middle classes of the Dalit and backward castes to take up leadership in the youth, women and cultural organisations and to achieve recognition for them among the people. Similarly, Dalit and backward caste leadership in the urban mass organisations also developed. With the result, we can see that the caste composition of the leadership of even progressive and revolutionary intellectuals' associations has gradually undergone changes. More and more people from OBC and Dalit backgrounds are now leading these organisations. In some organisations, the entire leadership hails from these backgrounds. Majority of the leadership of women's organisations formed with the inspiration of revolutionary movement comprise of those hailing from backward castes and Dalits.

If we look at the caste composition of the leadership today, the secretaries of Telangana, Dandakaranya, Andhra-Odisha Border committee, Jharkhand Special Area Committee, Bihar Special Area Committee are from Dalit, Adivasi and Backward caste background. These committees are the most important committees in the revolutionary movement.

Kuppu Swamy (Yogesh), who was killed along with Ajita in a fake encounter in 2016 in Kerala, was central committee member and the secretary of the bureau that was leading the revolutionary movement in the three southern states. He hailed from a Dalit Christian family. Another person from Dalit background was a polit-bureau member at the time of the formation of the Maoist party in 2004. He was subsequently arrested. Milind Teltumbde, who was killed in an encounter in 2021, was the secretary of Maharashtra-Madhya Pradesh-Chhattisgarh state committee secretary and Central Committee Member. He hailed from a Dalit coal miner's family. Haribhushan, who succumbed to Corona, at a relatively young age was the Telangana state committee secretary and Central committee member. He hailed from Adivasi background. Katakam Sudarshan, who passed away in 2023 due to heart attack was one of the tallest leaders of the Maoist movement and a senior Polit Bureau member. He hailed from a backward caste working class family.

90% of those elected to the central committee of the first congress of CPI(ML) in 1970 comprised of those coming from upper castes. However, by the time of formation of the Maoist party in 2004, while 49% had upper caste background, 51% belonged to the backward caste, Dalit, Adivasi and religious minority backgrounds. By 2016, after many arrests and fake encounter killings of the central committee members in more than twelve years, and the election of new members in to the committee, the percentage of the former has come down to 31% while the percentage of the latter rose to 69%. It is not an exaggeration to say that no other party has such a large number of persons from oppressed castes in the central leadership, except in some regional family based or caste-based parties.

According to the press statement released by the Maoist party which appeared in several newspapers last year, there was a leadership change in the Maoist party. As per the statement, Namballa Kesava Rao took up responsibility as the general secretary of the party while Tippiri Tirupati became the chief of central military commission. While the former hails from an officially OBC background, the latter is from a Dalit background.

How could this transformation take place under the leadership of those 90% who came from upper caste background? It is because they were true communists. They dreamt of a class-less and caste-less society and de-classified and de-castified themselves in the course of revolutionary movement and dedicated their lives to the pursuance of that dream.

The allegation that there is caste discrimination while electing leadership is thus baseless, fallacious and unfounded. When can one allege that there is such discrimination? If a person is denied election in spite of having more or less similar duration of revolutionary life, political and ideological knowledge and the ability to lead the movement compared to a person elected, then one can say that there is discrimination. But there is actually not a single instance of such discrimination.

There are no reservations to the leadership positions in the revolutionary movement. But due to constant efforts to develop leadership from not only basic classes but from the oppressed castes by taking up special training programmes, by adopting positive discrimination during promotions to the leading positions, this change has been possible.

One great achievement of the revolutionary movement is that the oppressed people of the Dalit and backward castes and Adivasis trained in class struggle increasingly gained leadership positions not only in the village-level Mass Organisations, Revolutionary People's Committees, People's Liberation Guerilla Army but also at the state and the central level party committees.

Another great achievement is the political mobilization and consolidation of the poor people of the Dalit and other backwards castes and also the poor and the middle classes of the upper castes through armed agrarian revolutionary movement in the vast rural areas of the Indian society, that fought feudalism and upper caste chauvinism for a long time, shook its foundation and the Brahmanical upper caste values based on it and brought forth a new perspective and a new path of struggle for the permanent solution of this problem.

The achievements in both the theory and practice are not final. There may yet be a lot to make amends for, theoretically and in practice. The revolutionary movement is learning through its own experiences and from all other movements, rectifying its mistakes and sharpening both its ideology as well as the practice. The main aim of this article is to establish that this is an ongoing process and the revolutionaries are not averse to making amends. This process can be further improved if all those who would like to wage a united fight for caste annihilation contribute positively to it.

(Sources for this article: My conversations with many Maoist leaders and cadre during my seven and a half years of incarceration; Many FIRs and Charge sheets of the cases right from the Parvatheepuram conspiracy case to Bheema-Koregaon case; Names of the leaders mentioned in these case files and the press statements by the police announcing bounties on the heads of Maoist leaders as per their ranks; Internet; Documents that were available in the site Bannedthought.net before it was blocked by the Indian government.)

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Constitutionalism: A Marxist Critique

Currently, various debates are going on about the Constitution in India.

These can be broadly divided into three types.

One, the attempts of the Sangh Parivar and the BJP to change the basic structure of the current Constitution to rewrite it with *Manuvad* values and to replace the federal system with a unitary one.

Two - the argument of many liberal secularists, Constitutionalists, Democrats and Ambedkarites calling for the preservation of the Constitution to thwart these efforts by the BJP. Some among them are interested in not only protecting the constitutional rights but also in preserving the Constitution as it is because Ambedkar is its author.

Third - the critique of the Constitution by the Marxist revolutionaries. Many of today's constitutional rights found their place in the Constitution because of many struggles waged by the people. Therefore, the people have to fight to protect these rights. To that extent, Marxist revolutionaries would agree with the constitutionalists. However, as per the Marxist understanding, the present State and the Constitution basically serve the ruling classes which are comprador big bourgeoisie and the landlord classes. Therefore, as per this understanding, this Constitution and the State have to be smashed and replaced with proletarian State and a Constitution that protect the interests of the working class and other exploited classes and sections.

People of this country became aware of democratic and civil rights due to the freedom struggle against British colonialism, democratic revolutions in the Western countries, Russian October Revolution, anti-feudal struggles that took place in our country, and the anti-caste and anti-

Brahminical struggles led by Ambedkar, Phule, Periyar and other progressive forces. Ambedkar and other progressive and democratic forces did their best to encode this awareness in the Constitution in the form of rights.

Many people's struggles took place even after the Constitution came into effect. There were the Telangana armed peasants struggle against the Nizam, the Naxalbari struggle that began in 1967 and the subsequent revolutionary movement and various other people's struggles. Many progressive amendments were made to the Constitution because of these struggles in the post-Ambedkar period as well. It is the duty of the people to defend these rights. We have to fight against the attempts of the ruling parties, especially of the BJP which is in power today, that are trying to destroy these rights. All progressive forces including the Marxist revolutionaries should be part of this fight. Even while doing so, there is a need to refute the approach that puts the Constitution beyond criticism and argues for solving the problems only within the framework of the Constitution. There is a need to refute this constitutionalism.

Before going into these matters in some more detail, we have to know about constitutionalism and how the State, the Constitution and the constitutional rights have evolved historically. It is also equally important to delve deeply into the relationship of the class system and class exploitation with the State and the Constitution.

Constitutionalism:

There are broadly two interpretations of constitutionalism.

One is an interpretation from a liberal point of view and the other is the interpretation from a Marxist point of view.

A Constitution is an official document that contains provisions that determine the structure of the government and of the country's political institutions, and that sets out regulations and limits for government and citizens.

According to Western liberal constitutionalism, a 'constitutional state' means a government with well defined limits, clear laws and clearly defined administrative procedures. There should be functioning legislatures, executive branch and judicial system that work in a framework as per prescribed method. If any changes are to be made in the system, that

should be done peacefully and systematically without any attempt at violence. There must be rule of law that ensures freedom and equality for all. There should be freedom of the press and pluralism that gives opportunity for anyone to come to power. Liberal constitutional view involves the separation of powers between different branches of the State. There are checks and balances to ensure that no branch of the State transgresses its authority and encroaches upon the authority of the other branches. For example, there is division of powers between the legislature, executive and the judiciary and there are rules in the Constitution itself to ensure that there is separation of powers and that they do not cross their respective lines. As per this view, the State is un-biased towards any section of the people. Everyone is equal before the Constitution and the law. In short, constitutionalism means rule of law.

This is broadly the liberal view of constitutionalism.

As per this view, the capitalist system seems to provide for an equal exchange between the workers and the capitalists, the Constitution appears to provide equal rights to all and the State seems to be a class-neutral institution.

This perspective fails to realize the fact that the basic function of the State and the Constitution is to serve the ruling classes or at the least it is indifferent to that fact. It does not take into account the influence of the accumulated wealth, power and prestige of the ruling class on politics and the lack of the same with the poor. On the whole this theory of liberal constitutionalism does not take into account 'social problems'.

Some progressive constitutionalists focus more on progressive interpretation of the Constitution. Their understanding is that the Constitution is good despite some flaws and the problem is in its implementation. They do not care about the systemic changes necessary for a true democracy to function.

Marx's understanding of the Constitution:

Throughout his life, Marx examined the subject of Constitution theoretically and historically. In 'Critique of Hegel's Theory of Rights' he discussed the question of Constitution in detail. He critically examined and discussed the constitutions and constitutional debates in the context

of the French Revolution and the German Revolution . He discussed this in detail in '18th Brumaire'.

The constitutional theory developed by Marx is not only political but also social and socialist in nature. It analyzes the intricacies of the Constitution not only from an ideological perspective but also from a socio-economic perspective. It rejects the claim that the Constitution is sacrosanct because it was written by great leaders and nation-builders, and it rejects the restrictions it imposes on future generations. It invites change and experimentation as opposed to treating the Constitution as something beyond the people. It rejects the concepts that the Constitution is above ordinary laws or that it binds together the general politics. It proposes that Constitution is born out of class struggle and comprises of many different social relations.

Marx's critique of the Constitution was not just about the separation of powers in the State, or about the struggle over access to the State. Marx's theory talks about extending democracy not only to the political sphere but also to the economic sphere. Marx's theory advocates social control of the state and that society should be comprised of 'free and associated toilers' to overcome the alienation of the people from the State. Thus, in Marx's view, democracy should be synonymous with socialism. Marx's constitutional critique stems from the need and possibility to establish an alternative to capitalism.

Marx argues in the '18th Brumaire' that the fundamental contradiction in modern Constitutions lies in the separation of social and political emancipation. 'On the one hand the French Constitution reinforces a class-based social system (a system in which workers are dependent on capital and exploitative wage labour) and on the other hand it gives all citizens the right to vote. It grants political emancipation on the one hand, but hinders social emancipation. This creates a contradiction. On the one hand it perpetuates the social enslavement of the workers, peasants and petty-bourgeoisie classes. On the other hand, it places political power in the hands of those classes through universal suffrage. It allows the old social power to continue in the hands of the bourgeoisie. At the same time it removes the political guarantee of that power. This means that the capitalist

class does not rule as a State of its own and is responsible for operating within certain democratic constraints. It restricts the working class from moving forward from political freedom to social emancipation. That means they can exercise their right to vote and participate in elections, but they should not ask for their economic and social equality, and should not fight for it.

The capitalist class may continue the old social oppression but there are restrictions on that class from moving towards the old form of political power (such as power in a monarchy). This means that exploitation of labor and exploitation of surplus value can continue, but not for endless political power, as in monarchies and feudalism. A 'democracy' should function within certain limits imposed on political power and not the unlimited political powers of old.

A Constitution that establishes a parliamentary democracy, by protecting the right to private property and by many other factors, restricts the political power of the people to fundamentally change the social order. Democracy and Constitution came into being through political revolution but it was an incomplete revolution. It prevents society from becoming more democratic. It seeks to deprive workers, peasants, and the petty-bourgeoisie of the power to change society by democratizing the economy. In other words, it stabilizes a socio-political system and prevents the people from further deepening of political democracy and prevents the continuation of the revolution'.

Marx says that what modern democracy is doing is to portray the State as something beyond the people and as a political instrument beyond material wealth. For example in a feudal society, the landlords wield the political power. Wealth also belonged to the landlord or the king. But in a modern State, everybody has equal political rights; and apparently the State is independent of wealth. But in reality, the wealth that influences that political right belongs to a few. Even if the State is used to increase that wealth, it is also done in the name of democracy. People also see that this is happening. But the relationship between changing the status quo and changing the system of production is masked by Constitution and democracy.

Modern Constitutions treat all citizens as a homogeneous group. But it does not take into account class differences and other differences between them. It proclaims the noble value that all are equal before the law. After much struggle it takes into account certain types of differences - for example caste differences, tribal-non-tribal differences only for certain limited purposes. Class differences are not taken into consideration. It does not take into account the relationship between these differences and the political power and other rights. Even the judiciary does not care about the existence of social classes. Liberal constitutionalism closes its eyes and does not concern itself with how all these are engendering the reproduction of these class, caste and other differences.

To further understand this Marxist understanding of the Constitution, one must know, even if only briefly, the origin and history of the State and Constitutions. Only then, we can understand the Marxist approach to constitutionalism.

Origin of The State – Class Exploitation:

Engels explains that, historically, the State arose at a point when society had developed the forces of production to the extent that it had become entangled in insoluble class antagonisms.

"But in order that these antagonisms, classes with conflicting interests, might not consume themselves and society in fruitless struggle, it became necessary to have a power seemingly standing above society that would alleviate the conflict and keep it within the bounds of 'order'; and this power, arisen out of society but placing itself above it, and alienating itself more and more from it, is the State".

The tool used by the State to establish that 'peace' in the society is the 'armed forces'. Courts , prisons, army are all part of it. In other words, although it may appear different on the surface, the power of the State is not class-neutral. It is a tool wielded by the propertied class to oppress the property-less class.

But it is not possible to keep the people down by force and force alone. So, in addition to that, laws and Constitutions (and other aspects like organised religion, literature, caste) came into existence. All the hitherto formed States have become stronger than the previous versions of it. The

modern State is the strongest of all. The Constitution is the beautiful shield that covers the real nature of this State. It is only embellished to cover its true nature.

Since its inception, the State has followed a set of rules, though they varied depending on the then prevailing system. But all the laws and rules that preceded the emergence of a modern democratic State were full of inequities. For instance, the laws and customs for slaves were different from those for the slave owners. The laws for landlords were different from those for serfs and peasants.

We have caste based feudalism in our country and therefore there are different sets of rules for Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras and Dalits. Rules for women are also different - that too caste-wise. *Varnashrama dharma* with inherent inequalities is the source of all laws and regulations. The concept of equal political power for all people was born in the course of struggle for bourgeois democratic rule with the advent of capitalism. The concept of democracy, which existed in the tribal societies before the class differentiation was fully established in them, sprung up again during the period of bourgeois democracy. It is this that led to the birth of modern Constitutions. These Constitutions granted equal political rights such as universal franchise and some social rights. These Constitutions also put some restrictions on the powers of the rulers.

Social and political background behind the development of this concept of equal rights:

In the process of social evolution, the production of commodities gradually increased in feudal societies. If the producers of those commodities want to sell them, they have to be the legal owners of the commodities they have produced. There should not be any dominance of the landlords. In feudal societies and monarchies, the rules and laws are imposed by the landlords. Moreover, these vary from region to region. Therefore, the landlords in Europe used to make announcements saying 'we will protect your business and we will provide armed protection in the trade routes to and from the trading cities' in order to increase the trade in their respective states. Traders themselves also employed their own forces. But in such a situation, whoever has more strength and power will have

the upper hand. That means there will be an unequal situation. Equal exchange of goods is not possible. If there is no equal exchange of goods, there will be disruption in the circulation and the production of commodities. This is not an acceptable situation for capitalists/commodity producers. Hence a principle, a rule, a slogan of equality between commodity producers/capitalists was born. The concept of equality is thus born from the concept of freedom of trade. This is the economic reason for the introduction of the concept of equality in modern States and Constitutions. The capitalists propagated ideas of various rights and egalitarianism to mobilize the masses, including the peasantry, to fight against feudalism. This is the political reason behind the concept of equality. It is for these economic and political reasons that the concept of equality has entered modern States and Constitutions.

Bourgeois democracy came into existence as feudalism was overthrown and the capitalist class came to power. This led to the written Constitutions in almost all modern democracies except Britain.

There is a contradiction in all these Constitutions. No Constitution of any capitalist country provides for economic equality. They gave only political equality. Marx explores this contradiction in his analysis of the French Constitution. 'On the one hand there are severe social and economical inequalities and on the other hand everyone has equal political rights according to the Constitution. This is a contradiction. Apart from that, capitalists have extensive financial resources and wealth. But the Constitution imposes certain restrictions and regulations on their political powers. This is another contradiction. These two contradictions lead to a crisis' - says Marx.

The basic role of the State has always been the same, whether it be the State of slave system of holding (or the first State of the Magadha Empire in our country) or the feudal State or 'modern democratic State.' It has always been an instrument to keep the workers under control and facilitate the exploitation of surplus labor. Constitutions also perform the same function. Constitutions are only a tool in the hands of the ruling classes in fulfilling this duty. Neutrality between the rulers and the ruled is an illusion even in the case of the modern Constitutions. The Constitution of India is no exception.

Moreover, these Constitutions and modern bourgeois democratic States came into existence only after several centuries of bloody and violent struggle. None of them came into existence through non-violent and peaceful struggles. The history of the emergence of Constitutions and democratic States of Britain, France, Germany, America and other countries is a history of bloody struggle.

Without understanding this nature and history, the Constitution is generally accorded a sacred and superior position. It is a common notion that the Constitutions should not be changed because the founders and great leaders of the nation or freedom fighters have drafted it. The argument that the Constitution is sacred and unalterable, is by itself undemocratic. As Thomas Jefferson said 'laws/Constitutions are of living men, not of dead men'. So even Constitutions are bound by limitations of time and space. It is but natural that the Constitutions undergo many changes depending on the strength of the class forces existing in that particular society at any given time. It is unnatural if this does not happen.

When power is concentrated in the hands of reactionary forces, we see violations of constitutional rights by all the institutions, including the judiciary, under the very guise of democracy even while chanting about the sanctity of the Constitution.

Men in power have created religion to be above the humans. Similarly, it is propagated that the Constitution is above all other laws and beyond any changes. However, 'just as it is not religion that creates man but man who creates religion, so it is not the Constitution that creates the people but the people who create the Constitution.'

Separation of powers among the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary is one of the cardinal principles of the modern Constitutions. Liberal constitutionalism says that these three organs of the State work independently of each other and mutually impose some limits on each other and maintain balance to prevent centralization and abuse of power. This argument masks the repressive nature of the Constitution and hides the fact that it is a tool in the hands of the ruling classes. Although there is an apparent separation of powers, the fact that the wealth of the ruling class influences them behind the scenes is kept hidden.

Marxists need to expose this essence.

Marx also criticizes holding judiciary above criticism and making it highly impossible to remove judges from high judicial positions. A legal system closely tied to the exploitative system tends to interpret the Constitution in a way that maintains the status quo and prevents any change. There is nothing people can do about it. A hallmark of modern Constitutional systems is the existence of such a judicial system opposed to the majority of the people.

An independent judiciary is only a fantasy. This legal system opposes any social control over it and prevents the State from becoming more democratic. For the judiciary to be accountable to the people, Marx proposes that judges should be elected like other public servants, held accountable for their judgments, and methods should be in place for their removal by the people.

By concealing the class nature of the courts, they are constantly hailed as sacred institutions that uphold justice and *Dharma*. But, in the past seventy five years, the courts have mainly upheld the interests of the ruling classes and the dominant castes with only a few exceptions.

When the Parliament made a law abolishing privy purses, the Supreme Court struck down the law saying that it is a violation of the right to private property. Parliament had to amend the Constitution. Even when the land reform laws were enacted and banks were nationalized, the courts adopted an anti-people attitude that these laws violated the right to private property. On the other hand, when the ruling classes grab the lands of farmers and tribals and make them refugees and when they brazenly violate the PESA Act and the 5th and 6th Schedules of the Parliament, in the name of SEZs, industries, dams, mines, airports and ports, the courts do not pass any judgments that these are violations of private property. In all this, the class nature of the courts is clearly evident. And we all know what judgments have been given in the case of innumerable attacks and massacres of the Dalits and minorities by the upper castes, Hindutva organisations in this country, acquitting the upper caste perpetrators. The upper casteist nature of the courts continues to emerge in restricting the reservation up to 50 percent and providing 10 percent EWS reservation to the upper

castes. As the BJP's political influence increases, we also see the courts issuing innumerable judgments in favor of Hindutva.

Efforts continue to mask the class nature of the courts by pretending that everything is fine and sing paeans of the judicial system when the courts rarely ever rule against the State or pass judgments in favor of the people.

In recent times, even criticizing the anti-people or pro-ruling class rulings of the courts from a progressive angle is increasingly considered as contempt of court. The corporate media, on the other hand, goes to the extent of portraying such criticisms as anti-constitutionality and even un-patriotic treason. Even those who criticize the judgments are afraid of contempt of court, adding a rider saying 'we have faith in the Indian judicial system'. We continue to see a situation where the criticism is very soft.

The 'rule of law' in imperialist countries also has another limitation. In almost all the countries of Europe and America, Constitutions and 'rule of law' came into force in the 18th and 19th centuries, but they were limited to those countries only. In the colonies they occupied, they did not rule by law, but by brute force. They ruled the countries of Asia, Africa and South America for three or four centuries in quite an inhuman fashion with violence and bloodshed and ' not by the rule of law'. All the European countries attacked China in the name of obstructing free trade when it objected to the import of opium, which was banned in their own countries. Those are infamously known as the Opium Wars. Such is nature of their 'rule of law'. There is no need to say more about the US military attacks today in violation of all international laws. This double standard adopted by the imperialist countries towards other countries is also seen in the implementation of the Constitution and laws within their countries. Forced opening of the economy to sell their goods under the guise of trade agreements with other countries and unilateral imposition of sanctions is also being done in the name of 'rule of law'.

Therefore, we need to understand the relationship between these States, Constitutions and the modes of production. Modern Constitutions came into existence only with the emergence of the capitalist system. We should always remember that their primary duty is to protect the interests of capitalists/ruling classes and imperialists.

Constitution of India:

In European countries, modern Constitutions came into existence in the process of overthrowing the feudal system and establishing a capitalist society and a corresponding bourgeois democratic state. The background to the origin of Constitution in India is different. British colonialism weakened after the Second World War and the British felt it safe to withdraw from here while protecting their economic interests in a situation where it was not possible to suppress the anti-colonial struggle going on in our country. In such circumstances, direct state power was handed over to the comprador bourgeoisie, rulers of princely states and landlords. Constitution was written here in that context. Thus, the Constitution was written in the context of India's transition from a semi-feudal-colonial country to a semi-colonial-semi-feudal country. Our Constitution has those limitations.

Formation of Constituent Assembly in our country:

Provincial (territorial) elections were held in January 1946 to elect the Constituent Assembly during the period when the British were still ruling our country. Not everyone had the right to vote in this election. There was no universal franchise. Only those who own land, pay rent, are educated, and some women had the right to vote. They elected representatives to the Provincial Assemblies and those representatives elected the members of the Constituent Assembly. That means these were indirect elections. Constituent Assembly was thus constituted with 299 members who were elected by indirect election in which only one sixth of India's adults were voters. In addition to these, 93 representatives were nominated from the provinces. That means they are the representatives of the princely states who were there without getting elected in any way.

The Constituent Assembly thus formed appointed a Drafting Committee to draft the Constitution. Dr. Ambedkar was the chairman of the drafting committee.

Ambedkar had lost the Bombay provincial election and was elected from East Bengal. But Ambedkar, who was elected from East Bengal, lost his seat in the Indian Constituent Assembly as the process of formation of Pakistan into a separate country had already begun. Fearing that he could not play any role in the drafting of the Constitution, Ambedkar

wrote a document entitled 'States and Minorities' on behalf of the 'Scheduled Castes Federation' to incorporate it into the Constitution. It contains Ambedkar's true ideas. But to make Ambedkar an integral part of the Constitution, Bombay Legislative Congress Party elected Dr. Ambedkar as a representative and sent him to the Constituent Assembly. Later, to Ambedkar's surprise, he was elected as a member of the drafting committee and later even as its president.

B.N. Rao, a judicial officer, was appointed as the Constitutional Adviser to the Constituent Assembly. (He once served as a British ICS officer and later as a judge in the Calcutta Court and also wrote the Constitution of Burma). In December 1946, Nehru introduced the principles to be included in the Constitution as a statement of objective. That later became the preamble of the constitution. Many committees were appointed to make recommendations on various matters. Apart from the Constitution Drafting Committee, 12 other main committees were formed under the leadership of Nehru, Patel, Rajendra Prasad, Abul Kalam Azad and others and made suggestions on various matters. Due to their enormous prestige, most of the recommendations of these committees were accepted by the Constitution Drafting Committee. Equipped by the reports of these committees and the Constitutions of other countries, B.N. Rao prepared the first draft of the Constitution and submitted it to the Constituent Assembly. After that, the Drafting Committee under the chairmanship of Ambedkar drafted the Constitution in detail and placed it before the Constituent Assembly for discussion. After detailed discussion the Constitution came into force after a total of two years eleven months eighteen days.

In the Constituent Assembly there are those with a capitalist mentality, while the representatives of the provinces were the direct representatives of the landlords. Apart from them, many of the representatives from the Congress and the Muslim League were feudals and had a feudal ideology. There were also those with liberal socialist ideas. Most of the 389 members of the assembly were from the upper castes and only 15 were women.

Looking at these details, we can understand that the original Constituent Assembly was not elected by the people. Moreover, it is wrong

to understand that the Constitution as a whole is a reflection of Ambedkar's ideas and opinions or that Ambedkar himself wrote the Constitution. To presume so would also be unfair to Ambedkar's opinions.

Ambedkar's Role in Constitution Writing – Limitations; Contradictions in the Constitution

When Ambedkar was given the responsibility of drafting the Constitution, he tried to include as many rights in the Constitution as possible for the 'Scheduled Castes' and other downtrodden communities for the upliftment of whom he had dedicated his whole life. Ambedkar was instrumental in including reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, for constitutionally banning untouchability and bonded labour. He put forth his views strongly on all other matters as well but in the end the representatives in the Constituent Assembly accepted only those that suited their interests. This is the limitation that Ambedkar faced. Ambedkar said in the Constituent Assembly that 'the drafting committee should work as per certain rules and regulations, and there is no other choice'. He also said that 'the drafting committee has implemented the instructions and orders given by the members with sincerity'. During a debate on a matter in the Parliament, he was criticized that he was the one who incorporated certain things in the Constitution and that he was the maker of the Constitution. To this, he replied in the Rajya Sabha on September 3, 1953, 'My answer is that I am not the maker of the Constitution, I am an unrecognized politician, I did whatever I was ordered to do against my will'. When the members further provoked him then he said that he would burn this Constitution. Once again talking about Article 31 of the Constitution (procedure of acquisition of private property by the government), he said 'I and the Constitution Drafting Committee have nothing to do with this article. We did not propose that'.

One of the anti-people aspects of the Constitution is the right to property. Right to property was a fundamental right in the first Constitution. So when the parliament enacted laws like land ceiling acts and abolition of privy purses, the landlords (a Kerala landowner named Kesavananda Bharati) challenged it in the Supreme Court, and the court struck down the law on the ground that right to property was a constitutional right. Article 31 of the Constitution describes the circumstances and manner in

These constitutions have granted Not freedom from religion, but freedom of religion. Similarly they have granted Not Freedom from property, but freedom of property. These constitutions or these States do not have a solution for the contradictions that arise from this. - Marx

which private property (private land, industries) can be acquired. Accordingly, fair or appropriate compensation shall be paid. Ambedkar opined that the government could not acquire private property without compensation. Thus, the Constitution had been protecting the right to property. During the 1950s-70s, the Supreme Court restrained State interference in property rights. The right to property was considered sacred.

Parliament had to amend the Constitution to rectify this. Parliament passed the 44th Amendment in 1978 which removed the right to property as a fundamental right and made it a general statutory right.

How preposterous is it from the point of view of the peasants and the landless to pay compensation for taking over the lands of the landlords!

Socialists and communists opposed the centralization of more powers at the center and argued that the states were being reduced to the level of municipalities. Ambedkar replied to this criticism that those powers were only to be used in times of war and other emergencies, and in normal circumstances the states and the center had equal powers. But we are witnessing what is happening in practice .

Fundamental rights and directive principles are enshrined in the constitution. Violations of rights by the State can be prosecuted in the courts, but if the directive principles are not implemented, no one is held accountable. This arrangement was opposed by many in the Constituent Assembly. In the beginning, even Ambedkar wanted to make the directive principles justiciable. But in the subsequent discussions, the proposals of BN Rao and others had to be accepted. In this way, the directive principles to be followed and implemented by the administration have been left out of the court's purview. Basic needs are not recognized as rights.

Ambedkar presented a long list of fundamental rights to the Constituent Assembly. He opined that fundamental rights and directive

principles should be at the same place. That is why the list presented by him includes rights and regulations for minorities, especially scheduled castes, and a social scheme to be implemented for ten years. However, the Constituent Assembly rejected the social scheme proposed by him on many occasions saying that it cannot be included in the Constitution and that it should be left to the laws.

Ambedkar expressed different views on the Constitution at different times. To some extent, like Marx, he correctly anticipated and warned against the contradictions of the social and political issues in the Constitution .

" On the 26th of January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics, we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognizing the principle of one man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value. How long shall we continue to live this life of contradictions? How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which this Assembly has laboriously built up," he said in his last concluding speech in the Constituent Assembly.

Despite this warning, he could not suggest a way to resolve the contradictions he mentioned owing to his outlook.

Ambedkar could not fully assess the role of the state machinery in implementing the Constitution and its true nature. Ambedkar's pragmatist view and Fabian socialist liberal view is the reason for this. If he had correct assessment then he would not have said the following in his last speech at the last meeting of the Constituent Assembly – 'If we wish to maintain democracy not merely in form, but also in fact, what must we do? The first thing in my judgement we must do is to hold fast to constitutional methods of achieving our social and economic objectives. It means we must abandon the bloody methods of revolution. It means that we must abandon the method of civil disobedience, noncooperation and satyagraha. When there

was no way left for constitutional methods for achieving economic and social objectives, there was a great deal of justification for unconstitutional methods. But where constitutional methods are open, there can be no justification for these unconstitutional methods. These methods are nothing but the Grammar of Anarchy and the sooner they are abandoned, the better for us.'

This was the confidence that Ambedkar had in the Constitution!

But in the same speech he also warned that if equality is not achieved, 'those suffering from inequality will destroy whatever democracy the Constituent Assembly has created'.

Where revolutions took place, the old state machinery was smashed and replaced with new machinery to a large extent. But because we got 'independence' in our country with the compromise reached with the British, the state machinery and the system of administration that existed during the British period continued almost as it is. The police, the military, the revenue system right from the village level to the higher levels, the judicial system - nothing changed. They they have been serving the new ruling classes comprising comprador big bourgeoisie and the landlords as loyally as they had served the British rulers.

We are seeing how this state machinery is implementing or rather not implementing the PESA Act, the 5th and 6th Schedules of the Constitution, the Dalit Rights Act and many other progressive pro-people laws. Ambedkar did not warn the people about the counter-revolutionary role that would be played by such a state apparatus. The oppressed people, the working people, the oppressed castes (except the handful of them who join the ruling classes) will not gain anything without destroying the old state machinery .

If we attribute the entire Constitution solely to Ambedkar, then we will have to make him responsible not only for the positive aspects of it but also for all the aspects that take away the rights of the people. How does this do justice to Ambedkar? Therefore, we have to accept and adopt only the rights for the oppressed castes and classes and women, which the progressive and democratic minded members of the Constituent Assembly, including Ambedkar, have specifically incorporated in the Constitution

and oppose those elements which are detrimental to the interests of the working people. Only then will it amount to truly honoring Ambedkar. Moreover, Ambedkar himself, because of his faith in the State and the Constitution due to his liberal political outlook, introduced in the Constitution certain aspects that are not acceptable to us. It is not right for us to not take a critical view of them.

When the members of the Lok Sabha criticized Ambedkar regarding certain aspects of the Constitution accusing him of incorporating them in the Constitution, Ambedkar himself said, 'I had only a nominal role in the drafting of the Constitution'. We should ask ourselves a question. Why did the parliament – representative of the ruling classes of the country – adopt the Constitution while the same parliament created conditions that forced Ambedkar to resign on a single matter like the Hindu Code Bill? They agreed to and adopted the Constitution because it basically and completely serves their interests and is suitable for them. The stand that one should uphold the Constitution because Ambedkar is the author of it serves only the interests of the ruling classes.

This constitutionalism only creats illusions among the the workers, peasants, Dalits, minorities and other oppressed people that they can ameliorate their conditions in this system itself instead of fighting for the establishment of a new democratic state. We have to realize that this State uses constitutionalism in the same way as it used the pseudo-patriotism. It only binds the people to the parliamentary path and kills their spirit and will to fight militantly.

Ambedkar proposed in 'State and Minorities' that the State should nationalise the agricultural land and key industries and should have control over the resources of production and that the produce should be distributed equally to all without caste differences etc. In addition to these, he proposed that the government should have control over the financial sector. He proposed that to encourage private industries.

This type of 'state socialism' proposed by Ambedkar is different from the socialist theory of Marxists. However, he does not have any method and the path to be adopted as to how to achieve any of the goals he has proposed. He strongly believed that social change was possible only within

the framework of parliamentary democracy, driven by the State. Will the State which has not even implemented the nominal land reform laws implement the scheme proposed by him? Isn't this an illusion regarding an exploitative State? Change is not possible by just setting the goal, no matter how well intentioned the goal is! What is the path to be adopted to achieve the goal ?

That is why we need to understand the limitations of Ambedkar in writing the Constitution. We should utilize the rights incorporated in the Constitution by him and other progressive forces. But at the same time we must reject the constitutionalism that stifles the fighting spirit of the people in the name of the Constitution and binds them, especially Dalits, Adivasis, Bahujans and minorities to the parliamentary path. Hence we should realize the limitations of Dalit-Bahujan constitutionalism.

Dalit-Bahujan Constitutionalism: Due to the struggles led by Ambedkar for the rights of Dalits, due to the inspiration given by Ambedkar, due to his teachings, due to the reservations provided by Ambedkar in the Constitution, many Dalits got education and jobs. They could stand up with dignity. They were able to get education and other rights that they were deprived of for thousands of years. Their social status has also improved a great deal. Enshrining certain rights in the Constitution itself has helped this. With the consciousness gained through these rights, and the consciousness gained through democratic and revolutionary movements, many more struggles were launched by the Dalit-Bahujans and they obtained more rights through various laws enacted.

A desire to share in parliamentary power with the suffrage conferred by the Constitution, and the political right that came with it, also grew. By the eighties and nineties, due to the changes in the rural economy and land relations, the peasant castes among the Shudras were able to acquire land. In many places they were able to grow as middle class farmers and rich farmers and in some places even as landlords. At the same time, the urban middle class, the educated intelligentsia and the bureaucratic class also grew out of the Dalit castes. In many places, the political power in the states also gradually shifted from the upper castes to the backward castes. The number of Dalit parliamentary leaders has also increased. Ambedkar and

Phule became symbols of self-respect for Dalits and Bahujans across the country after the Dalits, especially Kanshiram-led BSP, came forward with the slogan 'Why should we only have the votes and You have the seats'. Along with this, Dalit-Bahujan constitutionalism and identity politics also got stronger. Though the Dalit-Bahujans are launching many struggles, the above-mentioned leadership of the middle and rich classes among them is spreading the illusion that the Dalit-Bahujans will gain real State power through the parliamentary path only. They are trying to raise consciousness but within the limits of the Constitution and owing allegiance to it. They are failing to assess the true nature of the State. These illusions serve a section of the Dalits-Bahujans who have grown into an elite class and want to join the ruling elite. But they do not in any way serve the working class majority from among the Dalits-Bahujans. So Dalit and Bahujan toiling classes can fight for their true liberation only if this kind of constitutionalism is also categorically rejected.

If we accept the argument that 'Constitution is good, but only those who implement the Constitution are not good', then we would have to fight for the implementation of the Constitution. But it should be understood that there is a relationship between the Constitution and the mode of production. It should be recognized that the State and the Constitution exist primarily to protect the interests of the owners of the means of production. Then we must try to change the mode of production. Society is not built according to law and Constitution. Instead, the corresponding laws and Constitution come into being based on the structure of the society and the mode of production. Therefore, it is not possible to just change all anti-people aspects of the Constitution. It is not further possible to implement any of these changes. Basic changes are possible only through basic change in the mode of production. Realizing the inextricable relationship between the State, the Constitution and the mode of production, all the working classes, including those of the Dalits, Adivasis, Bahujans and the minorities, should strive to overthrow the exploitative mode of production, the exploitative State and Constitution and establish a new democratic state in its place.

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Book Review: 'Khairlanji A Bitter Crop'

Khairlanji : Caste-Class Understanding

Khairlanji is a village in Bhandara district of Maharashtra. In 2006 there were 181 families in this village. There were four Dalit families (three Mahar families, one Mang family) and 10 tribal families. The rest belong to various BC castes. The Bhot Mange family was a Mahar family. They were Buddhists. Bhot Mange family had four members - Bhayyalal Bhot Mange, his wife Surekha, children – Roshan, Priyanka and Sudhir. Surekha was a brave Ambedkarist. Those belonging to upper caste Hindu families sometimes left their cattle free which damaged the crops belonging to Bhot Manges. Then it was mainly Surekha who would fight back. Another farmer used to enter his farm through the farm owned by Bhot Mange's family. It caused loss to the Bhot Mange family when crops were grown. As the dispute escalated, Bhot Mange's family got the land surveyed with the help of their cousin Siddharth, and the surveyor's decision came in their favor. However, the relative convinced them to leave ten feet wide path so as not to escalate the dispute. But it hurt the ego of the 'upper castes'. They not only spread bad propaganda against Bhot Mange's family but also started harassing Priyanka on her way to and from school. One day a young man named Yogesh tried to sexually assault Priyanka and Siddharth went to Yogesh's house and reprimanded him. However, they did not file a police complaint to prevent the worsening of the situation. However, the villagers were not satisfied. Harassment against the Bhot Manges continued to increase. On September 3, 2006, Siddharth was ambushed and seriously injured on the grounds that it was he who was supporting the Bhot Mange family. Surekha and Priyanka saw this attack from a distance and ran to him. But the culprits ran away. They were recognised by Surekha and Priyanka. After Siddharth was admitted to the

hospital, they filed a police complaint with the help of Siddharth's younger brother. Even though the villagers threatened them, they did not back down. The police were initially reluctant to take the complaint but eventually registered a case and arrested 12 accused on September 29. But they got bail on the same day. However, these *Savarna* Hindus, belonging to the backward castes, could not tolerate their arrest for the attack on the Dalits. Those who were released on bail came out in a procession on tractors to the village along with their supporters. 50-60 people went to Bhot Mange's house on the same tractors. The women of the village also went to attack Bhot Mange's house. The Bhot Manges were severely beaten and Priyanka and Surekha were dragged by their hair and taken to the cattle shed where many people raped them. Some said they were raped even after death. They beat Roshan and Sudhir ordering them to rape their sister and mother. But when they refused, they crushed their genitals, beat them and killed them too. This horrifying carnage lasted for almost two hours. Then a bullock cart was brought and the four dead bodies were placed in it in a naked state and dumped at a distance of four kilometers from the village. Bhaiyalal survived as he was not at home at that time.

This was the Khairlanji Massacre in short.

Anand Teltumbde in his book, 'Khairlanji- A strange and Bitter Crop', has described the antecedents of this carnage, how the case was watered down by the police, media bias and the movement against this carnage in Maharashtra. Apart from that, he also discussed the issue of caste and class in detail. This article is a review of the translation of the book in Telugu.

Teltumbde is not only a prominent Ambedkarite but also a Marxist and democratic rights activist.

There is a very strong need for the unity of Dalit movement and the revolutionary movement. They should be complementary to each other and not competitive. This book could play the role of a catalyst to bring about change in the understanding needed to build a strong unity between the revolutionaries and the Dalit activists and Ambedkarites.

People like Chandrabhan Prasad and Milind Kamble argue that efforts should be made to promote Dalit capitalism and that Foreign Direct

Investment of the imperialists should be welcomed including in the retail business, which will contribute to the emancipation of Dalits. Apart from that, they also advocate for the abolition of land limitation laws, environmental laws and forest rights laws which are obstacles in attracting foreign investments and further development of capitalism. Teltumbde's work is necessary at a time when the lines of class division are being drawn more clearly than ever before in the name of Dalit interests.

Let us introduce and discuss the main formulations made by Teltumbde in this book. I would like to mention Teltumbde's formulations at length here. There is a reason for that. The author's thoughts and understanding have not been correctly translated in many places. In some other places, the importance of what the author wanted to say is toned down. In many places important things have been translated to imply the opposite of what the author intended. Teltumbde debunked many false formulations that are circulating today in the name of identity question, Dalit ideology and Ambedkarism. But it seems that the translators were shocked that Teltumbde could make such claims and translated the author's formulations in accordance with their understanding or as per the thoughts that are in vogue in the name of Dalit ideology. In some other places mistakes were made due to incorrect understanding of English. I am quoting the Teltumbde formulations at some length due to these errors. I have not removed these from the English translation of my article, which was originally in Telugu, as others also may suffer from such misunderstanding. However, English readers have the advantage of getting to know Teltumbde's formulations directly from the English original book.

What are the main proposals of Teltumbde ?

Caste society has undergone many changes in its nature and composition. Today Shudras/ Backward Castes (BCs) and Other Backward Castes (OBCs) are playing a major role in caste discrimination and caste attacks against Dalits. The main reason for the above changes is the political and economic changes that took place in the villages of the country from the time of the British and accelerated during the last six decades.

* Due to the above reason, *Bahujanwad* as a transformative ideology is an illusion; the unity between Shudras and Dalits is not possible on the basis of caste; it is possible only with class consciousness.
* Blaming Brahmins / *Dwijas* for the present state of caste system is an intellectual inertia.
* The nature of the state will not change just because the representation of Dalits increases in the present state machinery.
* It is an illusion that economic development and globalization will lead to caste annihilation.
* It is a delusion of the Left that all caste conflicts are rooted in land issues.
* It is an illusion to think that six decades of development have created a progressive non-Dalit 'civil society'.

Bahujanwad based on caste will not bring about transformation of the society. Caste attacks can be prevented and annihilation of the caste can be achieved only by getting rid of casteism and caste antagonisms, developing true class consciousness, and promoting unity of all the lower classes of the society regardless of caste.

Let's look at these in a little more detail.

Changes in the Caste System - Current relationship between Shudras and Dalits:

Caste society can be said to have remained unchanged at the structural and macro-level. But in reality, it has undergone many changes in its composition and character. The association of the caste system with the *shastras* has considerably weakened. The ritual basis of caste is also rarely manifested. Today's castes cannot be understood only on the basis of religion or tradition. We cannot really fight against caste on this basis.

Today's castes have become very complex due to the political and economic influences of our times. It is not any *Shastra, Manusmriti* that gives life to the survival of caste today. It is the modern state, its policies and institutions that are doing so. Due to this, the importance of caste increased instead of decreasing with time. During the period of colonial rule and especially after the last six decades of post-colonial rule, the caste

system got a new lease of life due to the policies implemented in the name of 'secular democratic politics and socialist economic policies' over an iniquitous social base. They also led to changes in caste relations.

The British introduced Zamindari system and ryotwari system to extract maximum surplus from the agriculture. On the one hand they created individual land holdings and also affected *balutedari/jajmani* client-patron system of caste wise provision of services among the villagers. This structural change, along with the opportunities created by capitalist production and investment in the infrastructure sector, caused the rural surplus workers (mostly Shudra castes and Dalits) to migrate to the cities. As a result, the foundations of the old caste system were shaken. This affected both caste relations and conflicts.

The anti-Brahmin movements led by the Shudra castes and the anti-caste movements of the Dalits that followed them were also related to these developments.

With the advent of modern education and the Western liberal regime, opportunities arose for the oppressed castes in the emerging capitalist sector. But to avail these opportunities, the *Dwija* (Brahminical) castes in the form of landlords and moneylenders became an obstacle in the rural areas. This gave rise to the anti-Brahmin struggle under the leadership of the Sudra castes. Soon in its wake, a strong Dalit movement also took shape under Ambedkar's leadership.

As a result of this anti-Brahmin struggle, the old elite (upper castes) shifted mainly to the economic sectors promoted by capitalism, while the farming Shudra castes began to seize land in the countryside. In the post-colonial India, the farming Shudra castes became significantly richer due to the land reforms, however poorly they were implemented and due to the subsequent green revolution. The villages came under the control of these Neo-rich *Shudra* castes. The old zamindari class was replaced by a new wealthy landlord class and a peasant class that owned its own lands.

Market minded upper caste and backward caste farmers replaced the old feudal landlord class. The benefits of government policies accrued mainly to these non-Brahmin and non-Dalit castes.

As mentioned above, while the upper castes mainly moved into the

economic sectors created by capitalism and globalization, the social groups (Shudras, Backward Castes - BCs) and Other Backward Castes (OBCs) that newly got opportunities entered the sectors they left behind. However, these social groups ended up in the traditional fields that remained within the traditional social framework. So today they are playing the main role in caste discrimination and caste attacks against Dalits. There is no direct involvement of the Brahmin caste in the attacks that have been going on for the last four decades.

While the Shudras are getting stronger in the rural areas, the Dalits are left as landless laborers in the rural areas. However, the Dalits have taken advantage of the opportunities provided by the Constitution to challenge the traditional caste-based power structure. A small section of Dalits has developed to some extent with the education and job opportunities it got due to reservation and other policies. Though it is only a small section that could avail these facilities and develop, the aspirations of many grew manifold. Otherwise, there is not much change in the economic status of Dalits.

The traditional foundations of caste have weakened due to increased capitalist relations, education and modernization over the last six decades. But the economic developments discussed above brought about a significant change in the social class-caste structure.

Along with the economic improvement of the Shudra castes in the rural areas, political changes also brought forth new caste mobilizations. Caste identity politics have become intensified.

The economic development of the Shudra castes led to the rise of their political aspirations. Due to the strength of numbers, they emerged as a strong force in the political arena. As politics became more competitive due to the growing aspirations of the upper classes among the Shudra castes, politicians started using caste identities for garnering votes. On the other hand, as the state resorted to cruel repression to suppress people's movements, the lower classes resorted to identity politics. With the rise of this identity politics, caste got a new use. For political gain, castes in a similar position started coming together. As even small caste communities were able to influence the results of elections beyond their proportion,

the importance of castes in politics increased and led to the consolidation of castes and caste groups. This led to the emergence of regional parties based on caste.

By 1970s, the landowning peasantry, mainly belonging to BC castes, got organized across the country. These Shudra castes formed regional parties and took power in almost every state. In North India the Yadavas, Kurmis and Koeris - became a formidable political force due to their numerical strength.

Similarly, different Shudra castes emerged as a strong power in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu and assumed power. After 1977, power was taken over by coalition government at the center as well.

As compared to the empowerment and rise of the BCs who grew as a bloc, the Dalits became weaker in the rural areas. But at the same time, their aspirations have increased. This situation led to new oppression, resistance and violence.

Caste divisions manifesting between *Savarnas* and *Avarnas*; Between Dalits and Non-Dalits and the Myth of *Bahujanwad*

Post-1960s, when the Shudra castes came to a dominant position in production, those castes successfully brought that change into the political and cultural spheres as well. Due to this many disputes and conflicts arose.

The rivalry that was there between the Brahmins and the peasant castes in the past had now turned into a rivalry between the peasant castes who mostly own the land and the Dalits who are landless labourers. In the past, the Brahmin castes were oppressor castes and the toiling Shudra castes, the oppressed ones. (Dalits were outcasts and *Avarnas* in the caste system and had no place in this society. Therefore, Ambedkar argued that the untouchables were not Hindus at all. Kanche Ilaiyya argued in his book 'Why I am not a Hindu' that Shudras were also not Hindus. But whatever may be the colonial-nationalist notion of 'Hindu', *Shudras* were always part of the caste system and the Dalits never are.)

At present, Shudra castes (BCs , OBCs) have become oppressors and Dalits have become the oppressed.

Today the expression of caste is emerging as a division between

Savarnas and *Avarnas* i.e. between Dalits and non-Dalits. This conflict between Dalits and non-Dalits is taking a violent form in rural areas. The fact that Dalits are landless agricultural laborers and Shudras are dominant landowners lays the material foundation for this conflict. The Shudra castes, who had emerged as the newly dominant caste, resisted the efforts of the working classes to improve their lives. Due to these changes in the agrarian sector, incidents of attacks on Dalits have increased. Violent suppression of their aspirations and their association increased. But this cannot be understood purely on economic grounds. The main reason is the deep-rooted social and cultural antagonism between Dalits and Shudras on the basis of traditional caste hierarchy.

The fact that Dalits are standing tall, holding Ambedkar high as their independent cultural symbol, and that educated Dalits are fighting for their rights and getting ahead of Shudras in the field of education - all these have become an eyesore not only to the upper castes but to the Shudras as well. Electoral politics also contributed to this. After the 1970s, the growing assertion of Dalits in electoral politics such as asserting their right to vote as per their choice and contesting panchayat elections etc. have led to anger towards Dalits.

Intellectuals who discuss the caste issue refuse to recognize these changes and cling to the traditional description of the caste system (satisfying with the short term 'Brahmanism' to understand and explain every caste-related problem). Anti-caste movements are also identifying enemies and friends based on outdated and obsolete *Varnas*. Anti-caste activists keep on parroting Ambedkar's teaching that "(the fight) is against Brahminism but not Brahmins; Brahmanism is not only limited to Brahmins but also affects Dalits", but in reality they fail to recognize the difference between Brahmins and Brahminism. People are identified by their caste. It is intellectual inertia to blame Brahmins and Dwijas for the present status of the caste system.

Due to the needs of electoral politics, the concept of 'Bahujans' has been brought forward, covering up the many contradictions between the Dalits and the OBCs at the village level. Many land-owning Shudra castes have also become a part of this mobilization. Some of the Shudra castes

which are no better off than the Dalits, are in a somewhat better position socially because of their socio-economic ties with the traditionally land-owning castes. Therefore, it is not fair to equate these castes with the socially outcast Dalits.

Bahujanwad is basically a strategy that works for Dalits to win electoral politics and not a principled one. According to this argument, all the lower Shudra castes and Dalits can unite to form a strong constituency to capture power. In fact, if we look at the material status of these castes, all of them are placed similarly and must come together. But while *Bahujanwad* wants people to be united on the basis of caste identities, this argument forgets the fact that the fundamental division of caste is between *Savarnas* (caste Hindus) and outcasts. Dalits fall outside the caste system.

From Keelavenmani to Khairlanji we see violent attacks on Dalits by the middle level Shudra castes. All the caste attacks in the country, including Khairlanji, bring out the fact that *Bahujanwad* cannot be a transformative strategy.

Bahujanwad makes sense as a transformative agenda only when it is based on uniting all the lower classes of society, regardless of caste. Caste idiom cannot serve as a basis for such unity. Because it is not possible to overcome the existential contradictions between castes. Caste seeks hierarchy. It is against the spirit of unity. Bahujana serves as a descriptive class but is not useful in the field of struggle.

Caste oppression and attacks will not end through modern capitalist policies or state intervention or through increase in the representation of Dalits in the current State or. The role played by the State in perpetuating caste and caste contradictions is not being understood well. The modernization undertaken by the Indian state is ostensibly meant to reduce the importance of caste, but instead it has strengthened the caste and has exacerbated all its ill effects.

Modernity and capitalism were not detrimental to caste.

Modernity means breaking the shackles of tradition and leading the country towards the path of progress! Everyone hoped that this would solve the caste problem. The Ambedkarist view of caste as a unique and crucial aspect of India also emphasized state intervention to reduce caste oppression.

But this modern process was bound to fail. Because the bourgeois-feudal state that came into existence after the transfer of power from the British represented a compromise between bourgeois interests and feudal interests. The compromise was to carry out modernization and fulfill the interests of the bourgeoisie and to maintain the status-quo control of the landlords over rural India and protect their interests. The state undertook the process of modernization because of the expectations of the landed classes that they would also benefit from modernization. Capitalism had already compromised with caste, religious institutions and tribal traditions. Instead of confronting them, it skillfully used them to its advantage. Modern education, urbanization and industrialization have only changed some of these institutions and not eradicated them. Hence both caste and modernity exist side by side. The State has undertaken protective schemes and development schemes to benefit the oppressed castes. But it did not touch the economic foundation of the Shudra castes linked to the land issue.

The notion that economic development and the cultural development that follows it will eliminate castes is incorrect. Similarly, it is an illusion that globalization weakens caste. The illusion that every caste conflict is linked to the land issue stems from economic determinism of certain Marxists. The land issue is undoubtedly a major cause of atrocities and attacks. It is also a fact that many conflicts related to land take the form of violence against Dalits. But the question is why such land disputes between non-Dalits do not lead to deadly attacks as they did in the case of Dalits. Secular reasons such as economic or land disputes may be the cause of increased resentment against Dalits. But caste is the most significant reason for a dispute to turn into atrocities and attacks. In fact, none of the worst atrocities in the country were caused by land disputes. Deep-seated caste prejudice causes a dispute to escalate into a vicious attack.

Analyzing the criminal role of the police in the atrocities perpetuated on Dalits in the context of Khairlanji, does not only show how anti-Dalit the State is, but it also shows that Dalits do not have much to gain even if Dalits are in positions of power as part of this system. The nature of the state, the role of Dalits as individuals and the way in which Naxalite violence is used an as excuse to perpetuate atrocities on Dalits and Adivasis are also clearly discernible.

The sad thing about Khairlanji is that all the important posts in the local state administration were occupied by Dalits. Bhandara SP and DSP, Andhalgaon police sub-inspector, area constable and the junior doctor who did the post-mortem and the civil surgeon who got it done by the junior doctor, public prosecutor, nodal officer are all Dalits. Most of them are Mahars. The Bhotmanges who were the victims of Khairlanji were also Mahars.

Then, why did it happen?

It would be naïve of the Dalits to expect that the nature of the state would change just by including some of their people in the state machinery. The character of an organization is not equal to the sum of the characters of all the individuals who run/defend that organization. Dalits do not understand this fact even though there are many experiences to prove this. Institutions have long life, whereas individuals live only for the duration of their lifetime. Institutions therefore reflect a hegemonic - class nature beyond individuals. If people do not conform to the nature of the organization/system, there will be intense pressure on them to conform. This pressure on Dalits is much more because of their class position. With the result, they consciously or unconsciously strike a compromise after sometime to survive. But to escape from the feeling of guilt, they claim that they are doing a lot for Dalits. But, whatever little is done for the Dalits is within the logic of statecraft and not beyond that. Even if an individual Dalit resists this pressure and initially serves the interests of Dalits, as he rises in power, he unwittingly acquires upper caste character. He gradually forgets his roots.

Dalits also believe that if their people are in positions of power, they will be helped in matters related to the government. Ambedkar also hoped for the same. But he had realized his folly and famously lamented that the educated people had deceived him. By giving a few Dalits a place in the bureaucracy, the illusions about the state will only increase. Moreover, it also obscures the fact that change in the nature of the state is possible only through sustained political pressure of the people against the ruling system.

Abolition of caste is possible only by uprooting the caste feeling/ caste consciousness and developing class consciousness:

Caste feeling has an infinitely divisive quality. Castes – fold into themselves when they have to come into contact with other castes. They try to establish their relative superiority. As soon as the pressure of upper castes for supremacy is removed, the castes find and invent a ladder within themselves. The different untouchable castes came together to manifest 'Dalit identity' to fight against Brahminism. As soon as this pressure was removed (the imperative to fight against Brahminism and the great leadership that gained the trust of all – both ceased), sub-castes arose within the Mahar caste, and they began to fight among themselves for their hierarchical superiority. Many unwanted developments in the Dalit movement can be analyzed in this framework. Caste in essence is an individualistic attitude. It constantly seeks superiority. The divisive ideology of caste does not stop at the family either. It can even go down to the individual level. When there is no external pressure on the family (i.e. no need to stay united due to an external enemy) family members also display their imagined caste superiority in a notional hierarchy. The entire culture of our country can be explained from this caste point of view.

This individualism aids only elite classes and castes. Only such people welcome free market and globalization. It is indisputable that unity between *Shudras* and Dalits is highly desirable. But it is necessary to recognize that caste is not the basis of such unity. It is possible only on a class basis. In fact, the caste system is so complex today that the caste basis is becoming meaningless. The sooner this basis is changed the better. But it would be wrong to reject caste altogether as an analytical tool. It would be like throwing baby with the bath water. What is needed is to sharpen our understanding of all the dynamics of caste.

How to stop caste attacks and atrocities? Caste imparts the ideology that "Dalits are low level people and they should be treated as such". Therefore, there is a societal consensus that defying this caste norm can be punished. The perpetrators of the atrocities are confident that the victims will not complain and even if they complain they can get away with anything they do due to their political and social clout. Their confidence that they

would not be punished even in the courts is what causes caste atrocities. When upper caste Hindus consider the act of Dalits standing up for their civil rights as an act of provocation, to say that they should not stand up for their rights to prevent the atrocities is basically equivalent to suppressing those civil rights. It is an act of backwardness worse than the atrocity. And the solution to this may be to curb the caste consciousness and caste antagonism. It can be observed that caste antagonism arises due to the anti-caste struggle of the oppressed castes. Hence stopping that struggle to prevent caste antagonism/enmity is escapism. Therefore, efforts should be made to eradicate the caste consciousness in order to prevent caste crimes. Recurrence of Khairlanjis can be avoided only by building genuine class consciousness.

To stop atrocities, caste has to be fought theoretically at ideological level. Attacks must be resisted and stopped at a physical level. The basic resource of power in rural areas - land - should be removed from the domain of private property and nationalized as proposed by Ambedkar in 'States and Minorities'.

Anti-caste struggle considered that caste had its foundations in religious scriptures and countered them ideologically. This was the first method. Dalits also need to be united and strengthened to stop the physical attacks. Outside forces must be mobilized to support them. If the attackers think that Dalits can resist attacks and retaliate, they will not dare to attack. For example, when Chenchuramaiah was killed by the People's War forces, there was no major atrocity in the area. If upper castes feel that Dalits have the support of the Naxalites, they will think twice about attacking Dalits. But attacks can also lead to counter-attacks as it happened in Bihar.

Another key strategy to combat the caste system is to remove land from the domain of personal property, which was the source of the power gap between Dalits and upper castes in rural areas. The ruling classes have staged the drama of fake land reforms. Nationalization of land would shake the foundations of the caste system. But in order to undertake such a task it is necessary to completely revolutionize the state.

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All the above views in this introductory/review article are from the book 'Khairlanji'. We have only put together all the theoretical proposals

of Teltumbde from different chapters in the book in one place. Only a few of the subheadings appropriate for the proposals have been added by the author of this article.

The details of the Khairlanji incident and the observations on the bias of the media etc. which are self evident are not dealt with in this article.

Let us discuss some of Teltumbde's proposals related to caste-class-land and economic development.

Discussing caste atrocities and land ownership, Teltumbde says in the last chapter of the book that land ownership - power (the power in the hands of Dalits) is an illusion. He criticizes the dogmatic leftists who see caste as only one aspect of class and believe in the self-created illusion that all caste conflicts are rooted in the land issue. He also criticized the leftists in India for adopting a dogmatic stance in this regard saying that this argument only supports economic deterministic approach of some Marxists.

Elsewhere, while discussing how to stop caste attacks and caste atrocities, he correctly recognizes that the source of upper caste power in rural areas is their almost exclusive ownership of land and says that the land should be removed from the domain of private property and nationalized as proposed by Ambedkar in *'States and Minorities'*.

The two comments may appear to contradict each other, but with a little interpretation, the apparent contradiction can be removed.

Ideologically the caste problem may be due to the caste culture which is rooted in the psyche of the Hindus for centuries. But the land question and the associated economic reasons should not be underestimated. The supremacy of the Brahmins in the rural areas was decisively dismantled due to the anti-Brahmin movement that also resulted in the change in the land relations! This change took place only when the ownership of land shifted from the Brahmin castes to the hands of the agricultural Shudra castes! Teltumbde, who has elaborately described and discussed this matter himself, says that 'we believe in the self-created illusion that all caste-conflicts are linked to the land issue', and there is an inkling of mocking of the Marxists in this. (When one uses the generic term Marxists that does not

make any distinction between the parliamentary leftists to the Revolutionary Maoists/Marxists). But the Marxist revolutionaries must take a point from the above criticism.

It is indisputable that land is the main source of power of the upper castes in rural India. However, it is not correct to say that all the caste conflicts are linked to the land issue. As the idea of caste supremacy is ingrained as a part of the culture itself, even where the land question is not an issue, many attacks took place on the Dalits when they stood up for their rights and self-respect. These attacks take place because the upper castes cannot tolerate this defiance of Dalits when they transgress their social and cultural boundaries. Even though secular causes such as land, economic development, etc., are the root cause of conflicts, the role of caste hierarchy and the resultant upper caste arrogance, which is a non-secular cause, should not be underestimated. The revolutionaries, especially, should not ever commit that mistake. Cultural struggle and anti-caste consciousness struggle should not be neglected at all.

But, is the nationalization of land, which is the source of power, feasible in the current system? It is exactly to resolve this question of land and political power that revolutionary war is being waged since Naxalbari revolt! The Indian government has been unleashing such a cruel repression just to drown that revolution in blood! The goal of the repressive operations like Greenhunt, Samadhan, Prahar and Kagar is also the same! Nationalization or socialization of land can only be a goal but not a means to an end when so much repression is launched even on the demand of 'land to the tiller'. Even when we look at the post-revolutionary experience in Russia and China, it is clear that nationalizing/socializing land is not an easy task even for a people's government.

Teltumbde did not to go into the depth of this issue nor discuss, from this angle, the Naxalite struggle that has been going on for more than five decades with this as a key issue. It would have been better if he had done it.

The proposition by Teltumbde that caste annihilation is not possible based on caste consciousness, caste identity, caste identity movements is a proposition that has to be taken into serious consideration. But this does

not mean that caste need not be taken into consideration. We need to understand this matter along with his proposition to sharpen our understanding regarding all aspects related to caste, caste exploitation and atrocities. It is true that the caste consciousness has definitely helped in understanding these aspects. But at the same time, we should also recognize that Caste is inherently divisive, and due to its hierarchical nature, it imposes serious limitations on the identity movements in achieving broad unity and in eradication of caste. Even the experience of the caste identity movements and various tribal identity movements/ nationality movements in North East Indian states for the past many decades also proves the same.

The struggles that started against the Indian ruling classes in North-East India have degenerated into incessant Naga-Kuki; Naga - Meiti; Meitei – Kuki; Bodo-Assamese; Bodo - Santhali tribal struggles. These are indirectly useful to the Indian Comprador Bourgeoisie ruling classes who exploit all. All such existential struggles, except perhaps the existential struggle of women, have elements that have the potential to split people vertically. This does not mean that identity struggles are completely wrong. It is only that identity struggles require a broad-based ideological foundation and consciousness. Seen from that perspective, it may be easier to understand the limitations of caste-based identity movements.

These points become clearer if we analyze the November 2012 attacks by Vanniyars on Dalits when a Dalit youth, married a Vanniyar (backward caste) girl in Nayakankottai village in Dharmapuri district, Tamil Nadu. The area was once a hotbed of Naxalite movement in Dharmapuri district. There was a class unity between Dalits and Vanniyars during the period when the Naxalite movement was strong. As there was unity and good will between the oppressed castes, inter-caste marriages took place without any serious disputes or attacks. As the Naxalite movement was suppressed and subsided, caste consciousness had gradually taken root there which resulted in the attacks on Dalits. Caste annihilation movements should keep all these factors in mind while building movements on caste issues etc.

It is in this background that we cannot help but agree with Teltumbde's argument that the unity between Shudras, Dalits and all the toiling masses

can only be achieved on the basis of class only and not on the basis of caste.

We hope that Teltumbde's propositions will serve as the necessary impetus for the caste annihilation movement to formulate a sound theoretical basis.

However, we have to evaluate some of Teltumbde's proposals to see if they are as intense as proposed by him.

For example, he said, while talking about the conflicts and caste conflicts that have grown between the Shudras and the Dalits, that the Brahmin castes have not directly committed caste attacks in the last four decades. But the most brutal massacres were carried out by Ranveer Sena of Bhumihars. Bhumihars are at present a caste almost like Brahmins. Did he see the attacks by Ranveer Sena only as clashes between Naxalites and Bhumihars? If you look at it like that then it is completely contrary to Teltumbde's argument where he saw caste even in the Nandigram struggle! Most of the victims of Ranveer Sena's atrocities were Dalits. These attacks were the result of a combination of land issue, power issue and upper caste arrogance.

While criticizing the civil society that it is not paying enough attention to the issue of caste attacks as much as it does against the communal attacks, he compared the response of the civil society against the Gujarat pogrom to the response against the Khairlanji atrocity. The comparison doesn't seem reasonable. It can be criticized without such a comparison. It is a fact that the scale of Khairlanji atrocity can not be compared to that of the Gujarat pogrom.

Teltumbde makes a proposition that it is only Dalits that died in the Nandigram struggle. One wonders if it is correct to look at it in such a manner. Because the grabbing of land in the name of SEZs or other projects does not affect people caste-wise in other areas except in the case of the Adivasis. Families of all castes in those areas are affected. (Whatever may be the case, it is difficult to accept this analysis unless there are more details in this regard). Dalits generally belong to landless families. So when people are displaced, naturally they are more affected than others. Even in matters of relocation, they definitely face more problems and discrimination

than others. All such other aspects associated with caste should be brought out. But it is difficult to agree with Teltumbde's comments in this regard unless there are more details.

(Published in the April 2014 issue of *Veekshanam*, a Telugu Monthly Magazine. In that article the crucial mistakes in the translation were also written. But we deleted that part in this book.)

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About the Author:

N. Ravi is a revolutionary activist. He joined Andhra Pradesh Radical Students Union (APRSU) in 1985 while studying M.Sc (Ag.) in Rajendranagar Agricultural College, Hyderabad. He became a full time activist of RSU. He was arrested in 1988 and spent a year in Mushirabad jail in TADA cases. After his release on bail, he joined Revolutionary Writers Association and Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee and worked till 1993. He then joined Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi for his Ph.D. In 1998, he left his studies to join the revolutionary movement in Bihar and later Jharkhand. He worked there till 2009. He was arrested in November, 2009 along with his wife and spent nearly seven years in the prisons of Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Upon his release in April 2016, he has been participating in democratic and progressive movements and is engaged in writing political and polemical articles from a Marxist point of view and translating books from English to Telugu. He has translated '30 years of Dandakaranya Cultural Movement' with the pen name of R.V.Sridhar, 'Gujarat Files' by Rana Ayyub, 'Varna to Jati' by Naveen Babu, co-translated 'Wretched of the Earth' by Frantz Fanon, 'Critiquing Brahminism' by Ajith (Muraleedharan). He has also translated some stories of 'Vernon Gonsolves' and from 'Viyyukka', a collection of stories of women revolutionaries.

This book is a collection of articles on caste question from a Revolutionary Marxist perspective.

Caste and Revolution by N. Ravi

Revolutionary parties that sincerely adopt mass line addressed any genuine questions raised by any section of the society – be it the feminists or the Dalits or some other sections and adopted the positive aspects of the critique even while analysing and announcing its critique from a Marxist perspective. Therefore, the questions raised by the Dalit and Bahujan intellectuals inspired the revolutionary parties to deeply study the caste question and develop a comprehensive understanding to devise programmes for the annihilation of caste.

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Caste-based Feudalism and Comprador Bureaucratic Capitalism and Imperialism that are working as the bulwark for the caste system should be smashed by successfully completing New Democratic Revolution and objective conditions for the caste annihilation should be created.

*

The Revolutionary Party released its perspective document on the caste question and incorporated its understanding about the caste question and the caste annihilation programme as an inherent part of the party's basic documents – the strategy and tactics and the party programme. How to fight the caste even in the post-revolutionary society was also made an integral part of these basic documents.

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The struggle against caste oppression should be waged as a part of New Democratic Revolution. Fight should be waged for the equal place of oppressed castes in all spheres of social life by fighting all forms of caste discrimination and oppression and to abolish the caste system.

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